

Weighing the Cost of the Bombing:
Two Views of What was Gained...

[2nd of 2 companion columns;
1st by Evans and Novak]

Joseph Kraft

... Or Minor Changes in Paris And Bitterness at Home

PRESIDENT NIXON'S second inaugural could have been a ceremony of national reconciliation. All the President's traditional foes were ready to extend the olive branch.

But Mr. Nixon didn't want any of that nice guy stuff. So the inaugural celebration will now unfold in an atmosphere of bitter feeling only partly assuaged by the prospect of settlement in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most impressive sign of what might have been came from the Democratic Party in the immediate aftermath of the election. Sen. Edward Kennedy, perhaps the President's most outspoken critic, spoke kind words about him in a speech to California Democrats. Sen. Hubert Humphrey, Mr. Nixon's antagonist in 1968, recorded a pre-inaugural appeal for unity.

At the same time, those hostile to the war cast a complaisant eye at the claims for impending peace made by Mr. Nixon and Henry Kissinger just before the election. These claims were taken at face value. Hardly anybody even bothered to question whether the peace terms the president said he had achieved were worth the cost paid out over the previous four years in men, treasure and national harmony.

Even in the press, there was building up the case for a new, historic Nixon. It was being said that after re-election Mr. Nixon would no longer need to show his toughness to hold the support of the American right wing. It was argued that he would care chiefly how he looked from the vantage point of the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. It was assumed that he would want to come across as a peacemaker in the world, and at home as a leader who drew the country around him.

Now that nascent spirit of harmony is shattered. The Democrats are organ-

izing for the fight of their lives against Mr. Nixon in the Congress.

The most ardent yearners for peace in Vietnam can knock down the suspicion of a Jerry-built deal, prepared at terrible cost, as trimming for the inauguration. In the press many of the President's most steadfast supporters, including the columnists William S. White and James Kilpatrick, have hit out against his policies of isolation and secrecy.

The main reason for the contentious spirit was the terror bombing of North Vietnam over the Christmas week. The use of B-52s was just plain wrong, and nothing could have justified it.

Now it is becoming increasingly

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clear that all Mr. Nixon achieved by the bombing was a couple of not very meaningful changes in the wording of the agreement reached in October. Perhaps the strongest line against him, accordingly, is being taken by once friendly legislators such as Chairman John Stennis of the Senate Armed Services Committee, who cannot stomach the application of crushing military power for wholly undefined political ends.

BUT FAR more than the bombing went into the making of the harsh climate that now hedges the inaugural. The central fact is that Mr. Nixon is not comfortable in an atmosphere of harmony and relaxed good will.

He believes in ruthless competition, the struggle red in tooth and claw. On his 60th birthday he didn't emphasize the qualities of tranquility. He emphasized the need not to let up in the struggle.

Just in case anybody didn't take that seriously, he invented for one of his birthday interviews a new competition—the President who can last longest in office without missing a day because of sickness. And in case anybody didn't get that message, he said it again by emphasizing his close association with those toughest of all competitors—the coaches of the two contending teams in the Super Bowl.

In that same tough spirit, the President set the tone of his relations with the 93rd Congress. He impounded on an unprecedented scale funds already appropriated, and he ignored the time-honored rule of advance consultation on major moves and appointments. In the selfsame spirit, he reorganized his administration, chopping away as dead wood, even loyal personal servitors of long standing.

What all this means is that Mr. Nixon's idea of history is not that of those who imagined they could cut it to their measure. He does not want peace and quiet. He wants action and contention. He's going to get it.

To me, it seems a pity. But it's his inaugural—with a vengeance.

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