

Cementing European Ties

PARIS—President Nixon did well in handling the impromptu summit meetings which developed around the funeral of Georges Pompidou here in Paris last week. The more so as, with Henry Kissinger off on honeymoon in Acapulco, the President was very much on his own.

At the outset of the visit here, to be sure, the White House performance was not impressive. Ronald Ziegler, the super-press secretary, asserted that it would be "inappropriate" for Mr. Nixon to talk business with other leaders during the Pompidou rites.

That typically Nixonian piece of piety rang more than usually false. It would have been taken amiss here if the President had not seized the occasion to talk at least a little business with such friendly leaders as Chancellor Willy Brandt of West Germany and Prime Minister Harold Wilson of Britain.

Another misfortune was the President's appearance. While not so striking to those who have seen him at press conferences over the past few months, it came as a shock to foreigners catching a glimpse of him for the first time in years. Here is a report sent by Patrick O'Donovan, the former Washington correspondent for the London observer:

"He looked a man fit for pity . . . he has not now got a face but a stiff mask with narrow eyes cut in it. It looks from a distance as if it were made of crumpled paper. He does not carry the authority of a great country; he has a defeated air. The corners of his mouth turn down as if he were wounded."

Appearances aside, however, Mr. Nixon was clearly up to the occasion. He saw all the right people and avoided the wrong ones — notably several French political figures who sought the presidential touch as a lift to their efforts in the race to succeed M. Pompidou.

At least one of those who spoke to him on a subject of some importance and not a few details reported that the

President "knew everything he should have known." The accounts of his talks given out by Mr. Ziegler and the White House chief of staff, Alexander Haig, suggested that he stressed all the right subjects: The enduring quality of Alliance relationships; the need for more consultation, particularly in the Mideast; and the hope for further exchanges of view before the Moscow summit late in June.

Inevitably these subjects had a strong interest for the President's most important interlocutors. As the new Socialist Prime Minister of Britain, Mr. Wilson is doing what he can to show that he has firm hold of the reins. Stressing the American connection is useful for that purpose. The more so as financial difficulties mean that the British government will require a massive dose of funds from international organizations where the American role is large.

As to Herr Brandt, his Social Democratic Party has done badly in recent state elections, and it looks as though it may do worse in the test coming up in Lower Saxony. Apparently the reason for his difficulties is fear the government cannot handle inflation. The best cure for those fears is to show the connection with good old, Uncle Sam.

The probability is that the British and West German leaders will be meeting with Mr. Nixon before he goes to see the Soviet party boss, Leonid Brezhnev, in June. The next President of France, whoever he is, will surely want a piece of that action after the election on May 19. So it seems likely that there will be an allied summit on the way to the Moscow summit.

Not much of importance is apt to come out of the Allied summit. All the governments are too feeble to take enduring action. Still it would be useful to get the ducks in a row on such issues as troops in Europe, the Mideast and cultural relations with the Communists.

Certainly more consultation between western heads of state at this time

does no harm. Those who believe that Mr. Nixon — by some ruse—will use the foreign forum to beat the impeachment rap are almost certainly wrong. Impeachment depends on a process and upon evidence which will stand on their own merits. In the meantime there is no reason to let the Presidents troubles impair American and allied interests anymore than necessary. The right approach is — impeachment maybe, masochism no.

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