

As Nixon Public Relations Deteriorate, So Ziegler's Stature and Influence Rise

By JOHN HERBERS
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WASHINGTON, July 22—In Moscow, he was listed among those American officials who participated in high-level discussions on détente. In Amman, Jordan, he was addressed as "His Excellency." At home and abroad, Ronald L. Ziegler is a constant and trusted confidant of the President.

And as Mr. Nixon's public relations have deteriorated, his principal officer in charge of P.R., as it is known in the White House, has risen higher and higher.

One of the abiding mysteries throughout the Watergate period is how Mr. Ziegler, as one of the original protégés of H. R. Haldeman, the former chief of staff, has survived and advanced. A succession of aides to the President—notably John B. Connally and Melvin R. Laird—tried to have him dismissed or moved out of the sensitive role of press secretary.

Even Charles G. Rebozo, the President's close friend, said in a recent interview with Nick Timmesch for McCall's magazine. "Public relations for the White House hasn't been very good. Ron Ziegler is a nice young man, but he doesn't know public relations."

Highest in Hierarchy

But the aides who sought to have him removed have left and Mr. Ziegler continues not only as press secretary but as assistant to the President, the highest rank in the White House hierarchy next to the President. There is no apparent evidence that anyone any longer tries to have him removed, and it appears that he will be a fixture in the White House as long as Mr. Nixon survives in office.

While no one removed from the closed circle of people around Mr. Nixon seems to know everything that Mr. Ziegler does for the President, it has become increasingly obvious that he is so closely involved with Mr. Nixon and spends so much time with him that he rather regularly reflects what is on the President's mind.

When Ronald Ziegler is angry it is a reasonably safe bet that the seclusive Mr. Nixon is angry. When Ronald Ziegler is calm and expansive it is likely the President is in a happy mood.

Thus, when Mr. Ziegler spent much of the day Friday in San Clemente, Calif., angrily denouncing John M. Doar, special counsel to the Democrats on

the House Judiciary Committee, for advocating Mr. Nixon's impeachment and calling the panel's proceedings "a kangaroo court," it was reasonable to assume that was the way Mr. Nixon felt.

Parallel Opinions

In May, before Mr. Nixon went on his foreign trips, he made some rather revealing statements about his attitudes toward impeachment in an interview with Rabbi Baruch M. Korff, president of the National Citizen's Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, published July 17.

Yet they were pretty much the same opinions Mr. Ziegler has been expressing for months: that the President is the victim of a political vendetta, that wrongdoing in the White House would have been treated only as a "blip" had a liberal been President.

However deep the troubles for the Nixon Presidency or arduous the work for Ronald Ziegler—no one can remember him taking a vacation—he always emerges as bouncy and confident as ever.

A few weeks ago, he was overweight and frequently looked pale and tired. Then, within a few weeks he went on a diet and lost 30 pounds. At San Clemente, he rides a motorcycle to work.

When the President goes to church, the 35-year-old Mr. Ziegler shows up, too, scrubbed and starched and looking like a junior deacon. While he has been close to the Watergate investigation and has denied the guilt of those who later confessed, he has never conveyed much sense of wrongdoing.

Fierce Temper

In private, he has a fierce temper, directed usually at what he sees as the President's enemies on the outside—liberal Democrats and elements of the news media.

On July 10, after a long news conference in which he sought to persuade reporters that a March 22, 1973, tape recording on which Mr. Nixon discussed "stonewalling" the Senate Watergate committee was of "dubious relevancy" to the President's role in Watergate, Dan Rather of CBS News said he had a personal question: "Are you absolutely comfortable with what you have been saying here this morning, in your own conscience?" Mr. Ziegler did not get angry

or flushed. He did not blink. He said:

"I am totally comfortable with every statement that I have made here. I believe it. I believe everything that I have said in terms of the President, and I believe everything I have said in terms of what I feel the tapes show and what the evidence will show. I certainly do."

False Statements

It was a year ago that efforts to remove Mr. Ziegler were at their peak. His office had put out a succession of misleading or false statements about Watergate matters—Mr. Ziegler later said he had proceeded on the best information he had—and the daily briefings deteriorated into sessions at which reporters openly expressed disbelief of official statements.

The sessions did not improve when Mr. Ziegler turned over most briefings to Gerald L. Warren, his deputy, because Mr. Ziegler continued in over-all charge. Mr. Nixon was reported to have shunned all advice to make a change. *NIX? ZIEG?*
"They will never get that pound of flesh," he was reported to have said by John Osborne in The New Republic.

Some high officials expressed displeasure at appearing at the White House press room to explain official policies. One who refused to do so called it a "poisoned forum." Yet the situation continued unchanged, even though some of the President's advisers felt that Mr. Nixon's interests would best be served by replacing Mr. Ziegler.

One of the most frequently asked questions around the White House is: on what does Mr. Ziegler, who has a limited background, largely in advertising, advise the President? The answer from him and other aides is that he gives advice on such subjects as communications, the President's appearances and the public stance he will take in Watergate-related matters.

Others say he does a lot of listening to the President's complaints and runs many Presidential errands. His access gives him considerable authority among other officials.

One official who has worked in the White House since Mr. Nixon took office said: "It's still Richard Nixon's White House and Ron Ziegler continues to be an enthusiastic supporter who feels honored to be part of it."

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Associated Press

Ronald L. Ziegler, Presidential press secretary, briefing newsmen on impeachment last Friday at Mr. Nixon's estate in San Clemente, Calif.