

Inauguration Day

NOW THAT the long phase of virtual interregnum between the new and the old administrations is just about over, we can look with renewed gratitude upon our institutions. They have been subjected to an unprecedented, hard test from the moment the results of the election became known. The constitutional break of continuity in the nation's leadership gave our opponents abroad large opportunities for mischief, and they took good advantage of them from Laos to Cuba, just as they enjoyed the long election season when the full exercise of Presidential power was necessarily in abeyance. It is doubtful whether Khrushchev would have dared play the role of the world's paramount politician at the last session of the General Assembly, and inflict on the United Nations a harm that still seems beyond repair, if, to face him, there had been a President whose term of office was not coming to an end.

These periodic ritual changes of the guard, these consultations lasting months and months between two ill-defined would-be administrations and the American people, ending when the people choose—all these rules and traditions designed to keep a country free from tyranny sometimes seem to endanger the very freedom they are designed to preserve. Yet at the end, as we can see now, this is not so: the system serves the country well. The Russian people would be far better off if they could know why the rate of their agricultural production is going down sharply, and if they could ready themselves for the end of Khrushchev's term of office.

Thanks to our institutions, we now have a chance to take a fresh look at the state of our affairs both at home and abroad, with the full realization that the line of demarcation between the two realms has forever been erased. The men of the new administration are in primary but not exclusive charge of this fresh look in the different sectors to which they are assigned. The President, as the central overseer, will report to Congress and to the people, and propose the lines of action for which he is responsible.

Again, this is a good system—the best. Continuity with the past, far from being broken, is sealed anew, for the new men who take hold of government have the duty to

learn from the mistakes or shortcomings of their predecessors. The men of the Kennedy administration have plenty of such educational opportunities. But this is not the time to criticize the policies of the Eisenhower era. This is the time to say good-by to the men who are leaving after having served the country as well as they could. Above all, it is at this time that we must start sizing up the new administration and the dangers it faces both within and outside its ranks.

The Young Middle-Aged

They are a rather curious lot, these men who have so far been appointed to the various departments and agencies of the government. It is generally stated that they are predominantly intellectuals, since quite a few of them have been professors, writers of books, or speechwriters for previous Presidential candidates. Among those men of learning there is even a dean—from Harvard, of course. Yet it would be difficult to define the ideological traits of these more or less brainy, more or less learned people.

Competency seems to be the prevailing characteristic; a quiet, soft-spoken knowledge of one's field, a solid possession of a background of learning, accompanied by a capacity to learn more. There has been so much talk about youth, and the spirit of the twentieth century asserting itself through young men born when the twentieth century was well on its way. To judge by this cluster of new men, the twentieth century would seem to be one where birth control of ideologies is extensively practiced. To be sure, a few of the members of Mr. Kennedy's official family have proved to be successful coiners of slogans. But this is something that hasn't much to do with ideologies, or maybe even with ideas. The wide circulation of such phrases as "take-off stage of economic development" or "affluent society" simply proves that Madison Avenue has no corner on the production and merchandising of clichés.

The Kennedy administration comes to power blissfully free of any high-sounding campaign commitments. Certainly there was more youthful crusading vigor in the Republican campaign of 1952, with all its talk of

"liberation" and "rollback," and the end of the "negative, futile, and immoral policy of containment." The list could be very long, and not pleasing to retell these days. During his campaign, Mr. Kennedy hammered with great consistency mainly on one pledge: to move ahead. The nation ought to be grateful to him, even if his campaign was not exciting. The same can be said, we must add, about his opponent's campaign. These times may be too serious for exciting campaigns.

Moreover, we do not suffer from any scarcity of diagnoses of the nation's ills or of remedies for them. Ponderous reports on what's wrong with our diplomacy, our strategy, our educational system, on the slowing down of our economic growth, and on the lowering of our international prestige have been piling up. The findings have been summarized and codified, hashed and rehashed. For the most part, they are the result of collective nonpartisan thinking. To their compilation and codification some men now prominent in the Kennedy administration greatly contributed. But there was no follow-up to all these detailed, sober recommendations on how to reset our country's course. This the earnest, competent men working under a dedicated young President will have to do.

The Partisans of Sunrise

During these last few years, the dictates of certified political wisdom have run the danger of turning into commonplaces for want of action. But a number of other commonplaces have been circulating that are not the result of wisdom gone stale. As we are now entering the era when long-established desiderata are to become operational, it is not too early to start separating the wheat from the chaff.

It has been stated *ad nauseam* by well-meaning people that we must identify ourselves with the liberation movements in every underdeveloped area. This startling message was recently brought home by Senator Moss of Utah after a tour of Africa with some of his colleagues. What it means we fail to see, unless it is the equivalent of proclaiming that each day at dawn we should identify ourselves with the cause of sunrise. The liberation movements are something that do not need support and do not tolerate antagonism. Rather, as the most powerful nation of the West, we should constantly ask: after liberation, what? How can the sovereignty of a new nation emerging from colonialism find its validation in solvency? How can new nations establish federal bonds among themselves so as to become viable, independent partners in the international community?

Nationalism, no matter whether of the Communist or the anti-Communist variety, is not synonymous with virtue, and does not necessarily mean a genuine concern with the people's welfare. National independence as a goal in itself, like decolonization as a goal in itself—these are policies that Khrushchev has every possible reason to pursue. The larger the number of unviable

new nations, all duly admitted to the U.N., the more thorough and more violent the break between the new nations and their mother countries, the better for international Communism.

We, on the contrary, should have an entirely different goal: the transformation of colonial bondage into free association between the formerly colonial nations and the western mother countries—or the West at large. This is exactly the policy which Charles de Gaulle has steadily pursued in Africa, and which he is now trying to bring to ultimate completion in Algeria. Should de Gaulle fail for any reason, be it Moslem extremism armed by the Communists or revolution at home; should de Gaulle fall, the western coalition would receive a blow at least comparable to losing Berlin. Yet there are well-meaning people in our midst, including some U.S. congressmen, who unblushingly advocate the cause of turning our back on France and giving our full support to the Algerian nationalists.

THESE ARE not inappropriate things to talk about in the days of festivity when the new administration goes to Washington. We have confidence in that administration and in the unglamorous competence of the men who compose it. But we must be aware that among its supporters in Congress and in the country there is what may be called a sappy fringe. The tendency to adopt a foreign nation or, in a more wholesale fashion, a faraway continent is very old and deep-rooted in our country, and certainly has got us into enough trouble, as in the case of China, which was long ago adopted by missionaries or sons of missionaries.

The men in the new administration perforce have to be men of action. Not much blueprinting is asked of them, for they have even too many blueprints to dust off and relearn. The most urgent job they face is the establishment of federal or confederal bonds among the nations of the western community. How and in what areas this has to be done, how the NATO alliance must be made into a political and economic commonwealth, all this has been stated too many times. The idea of the regional grouping of free peoples within the framework of the United Nations has been stressed by any number of national leaders, including President Eisenhower in his first inaugural. The only thing that's left is to do it, starting with and giving the example in the community we belong to. A few members of our community may have strayed or made mistakes, like Belgium or Portugal, which is in fact still straying. But our first obligation is to advise and assist the nations whose civilization we share.

The 20th of this month can be a great day in our nation's history if in taking the oath of office President Kennedy realizes that, together with the Presidency of the United States, he is assuming the leadership of the West. We devoutly hope that this realization will be clear in his mind and will dictate his actions.



Diem Defeats His Own Best Troops

STANLEY KARNOW

SAIGON
AT THREE one humid morning last November, three battalions of paratroopers surrounded the handsome Saigon palace of South Vietnam's President Ngo Dinh Diem. Within thirty-six hours, their attempted revolt had been crushed. The rebel chiefs fled to sanctuary in Cambodia, and the rebel troops themselves, forced to surrender, tactfully reaffirmed their allegiance to the régime. Bullet holes in buildings were quickly plastered in. The dead were discreetly buried. President Diem, who has survived several serious scrapes in his six years of power, emerged from the fortified cellar of his palace with another narrow triumph to his credit. "The government continues to serve the nation," he intoned confidently, and his spokesmen dismissed the abortive *coup d'état* as merely "an incident."

So it was—just an incident. But it was the most dramatic symptom to date of a deeper disturbance that has plagued South Vietnam for a year or more. Beneath the appearance of calm and stability, and despite all the government's assurances of security, President Diem's régime may well be approaching collapse, and with such a collapse, the country could fall to the Communists. "The situation is desperate," an official told me a few weeks ago.

Bands of Communist guerrillas, directed from Hanoi in North Vietnam, roam almost every rural region, blowing up bridges, blocking roads, terrorizing farmers, and attacking army posts. This menace has been compounded by the demoralization of the peasants, the army, and what the French-oriented Vietnamese call "*les intellectuels*." Most serious of all, perhaps, is President Diem's own attitude. He seems to have survived the revolt with his ego unscathed and his faith in his own infallibility renewed.

DIEM is a complex personality. From his mixed Catholic and Confucian background evolved a combination of monk and mandarin, a kind of ascetic authoritarian. He is a deceptively dainty-looking man; in fact, he is tough and obstinate. To a significant degree, his stubborn self-righteousness saved a régime that most "experts" considered lost back in 1955, after the Geneva Agreement had divided South Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. Amply bolstered by American sympathy and material aid—which has totaled more than a billion dollars in the past five years—he successfully fought off the insurgent sects, consolidated a government, welcomed and resettled almost a million refugees from the Communist North. He initiated a

land-reform program and embarked upon such ambitious projects as building roads and railways, extending agricultural credit, and establishing light industries.

In all his energetic enterprises, the fixation in Diem's mind has been survival. But in his concentration on survival, Diem seems to have paralyzed rather than inspired those around him. He demands absolute loyalty and has developed an inability or unwillingness to trust others. Instead, fearful of betrayal, impatient with any initiative by underlings, he has gathered all power to himself, and working as much as fifteen hours a day, he plunges into the most minute details of administration, personally signing passport applications, reserving for himself the right to approve a student's scholarship to the United States. He has even been known to decide on the distance between roadside trees.

This sort of one-man rule is not uncommon in underdeveloped countries that lack trained personnel. But it discourages the development of a responsible civil service, and it can inspire minor officials to all sorts of red tape and pettifoggery. Without any balanced administrative structure, officials turn to the most convenient source of power. Here, Diem's family—he does trust them—display their peculiar talents. They