

Reagan's cabinet choices: they're up for grabs

by Kathleen Murphy

Although the shape of the Reagan government is being accurately described by Washington insiders as "still very much an open question" with respect to policies and personnel, there are indications that one faction at least is striving to ensure the new administration makes a clean break with both Democratic and Republican policies of the past.

The fight now raging between contending groups for control over Reagan's economic program (see article, p. 6) is being reflected in other areas, particularly over membership in the cabinet.

Reagan has repeatedly insisted that he plans to greatly expand the powers of the cabinet, making department heads responsible for overall policy and not simply for their own bailiwicks.

In a Nov. 12 speech to the National Association of Counties in Washington, transition director Ed Meese, a long-time political confidante and aide to the President-elect, made the same point, emphasizing that increasing the responsibilities of the cabinet would mean a proportionate downgrading of the White House staff. (Reagan's stated commitment to take away all policy-formulating functions from the national security adviser and reinstate the secretary of state as the foreign policy spokesman for the U.S. government is one example of how this would work.)

Reagan's emphasis on the role of the cabinet explains why its composition has emerged as a major battle-

ground between the various political factions fighting for predominance in the incoming administration.

The Eastern Establishment, both through private channels and through its press outlets has been attempting to steer Reagan into peopling his cabinet with such holdovers from the Nixon-Ford days as former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and ex-Treasury Secretary George Shultz. Despite this, it appears that Reagan is leaning toward a cabinet that represents a more independent cast.

His spokesman, Ed Meese, has been repeatedly cautioning against taking published reports that Reagan will choose his cabinet from among the old Rockefeller Republican wing of the party too seriously. The day after the election, he told reporters that the cabinet will include "a lot of dark horses." Meese himself will hold a cabinet seat as presidential counselor.

Meese was even more explicit in a Nov. 9 appearance on NBC-TV's Meet the Press. Asked by reporters if it were true that Reagan's cabinet would be simply a Nixon reshuffle, Meese bluntly replied: "Our administration will not be a Nixon-Ford restoration," and went on to point out that Reagan intends to bring on board people with no government experience whatsoever.

The key requirement for membership, he said, was "philosophical compatibility" with the new administration's goals. Meese made the point even sharper when asked whether he considered the Nixon-Ford economic

program (engineered by many of the same people the East Coast press is pushing for high-level posts) to have been successful: While I prefer to let history make its own judgement, he replied, the main point is that the Reagan administration will have its own economic program, and the overwhelming popular mandate to implement it.

Reagan himself made much the same point in an interview published in the Nov. 17 issue of *Time* magazine. The President-elect said his cabinet would include a lot of surprises, and not solely the presence of some Democrats.

Discussing his yardstick for cabinet appointments, Reagan said: "My basic rule is that I want people who don't want a job in the government. I want people who are already so successful that they would regard government as a step down, not a step up. Out there in the private sector, there's an awful lot of brains and talents in people who haven't learned all the things you 'can't' do."

An important sign that these statements are meant very seriously was the formation Nov. 10 of a transition-group committee which has been charged with making recommendations for cabinet and sub-cabinet appointments. Its composition is a significant indication that Reagan intends to seek cabinet members from outside the Eastern Establishment's charmed circle.

Headed by William French Smith, a Los Angeles lawyer who has been Reagan's personal attorney for years, the committee is heavily weighted to the so-called California mafia, a closely knit group of California entrepreneurs who funded Reagan's successful gubernatorial bid in 1966 and have backed him politically and personally since then.

Representing this group on the committee are Justin Dart, head of the multibillion-dollar Dart Industries, a Los Angeles-based plastics and chemicals conglomerate which does business in more than 30 foreign countries; Earl Jorgensen, the 82-year-old founder and chief executive officer of Jorgensen Steel, a highly profitable California steel manufacturing company specializing in oil drilling and rigging equipment; Alfred Bloomingdale, founder of Diners' Club; oil magnate Jack Wrather; rancher William Wilson; movie entrepreneur Theodore Cummings; and Holmes Tuttle, a wealthy Los Angeles auto dealer. Many of these men had been among the earliest backers of Sen. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential bid.

Senator Paul Laxalt, a close personal friend of Reagan and chairman of his 1976 and 1980 campaigns, is also a member, as are Ed Meese and Michael Deaver, who held a top post in Reagan's Sacramento administration.

Representing a more Eastern Establishment bias on the committee are William Casey, chairman of the transition team; former Treasury Secretary William Simon,

and ex-Office of Management and Budget head Caspar Weinberger.

The composition of this group is significant for several reasons. First, the fact that it's dominated by the Californians suggests that Reagan has rejected arguments that he must give most top government slots to Establishment members in order to govern effectively, and that he intends instead to rely on his own political base to an important extent.

Secondly, the California group, with a few possible exceptions, generally holds to a pro-technology, anti-zero-growth perspective which would enable it to function as a strong counterweight to the pro-austerity faction around Reagan who want him to implement the same kind of belt-tightening policies endorsed by Reagan economic adviser Milton Friedman through which Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher has wrecked much of the British economy.

It is likely that several members of this committee will receive cabinet appointments themselves. One interesting possibility is Justin Dart, who reportedly advocated the "supply side" economic faction, represented by Rep. Jack Kemp, who oppose the "Thatcherites."

Dart is said to be interested in either Commerce or Treasury. He has so far been unavailable for comment. William French Smith is also reported to be under consideration for attorney general, while Bill Simon is a candidate for one of the principal economic or energy posts.

Meese's inclusion in the group is also significant, since it puts him in a prime position to shape the new cabinet. Reagan is said to trust Meese's judgement in particular. When Reagan was asked early in the campaign whom he would turn to in office if he had a particularly difficult problem to face, he quickly replied, "Ed Meese."

Meese, who used to be the deputy district attorney of Alamada County (Southern California) and is on leave as head of a University of San Diego Law School subdivision, combines both a progrowth outlook of Reagan's California business backers with deep contempt for such liberal social policies as drug decriminalization. A retired Army lieutenant colonel with a son at West Point, Meese also has a relatively indepth familiarity with defense issues.

When he takes over as White House counselor, Meese will have oversight over not only the domestic policy staff but the national security staff.

Some of the other Reagan transition team appointments also look promising. Elizabeth Dole, former head of the Federal Trade Commission and wife of Sen. Robert Dole (R-Kans.), has been given responsibility over human resources, while Richard Fairbanks, an energy expert who favors fusion power development, is heading up the energy and resources section.