

Nixon reverses himself on wage-price controls

by Norma Milligan
Newsweek Feature Service

WASHINGTON—When President Richard Nixon talks about wage-price freezes, he talks from experience. He's been there before.

It was January 1942, and there was another period of inflation and another price freeze, when Dick and Pat Nixon moved out of their garage apartment in Whittier, Calif., and took their first long train-ride to Washington, D.C.

Vast new governmental bureaucracies were forming all around the city and lawyers were in demand, especially young lawyers who couldn't command large salaries. The 28-year-old Nixon walked into the newly created Office of Price Administration and asked for a job. He was interviewed by Thomas I. Emerson, now a law professor at Yale.

"DICK NIXON came into my office without warning," Emerson now recalls. "He just walked in and said he had come to Washington to get into the war effort. I found he had a very good record at Duke and a good law practice in Whittier. I gave him a job right then and there."

It was not the kind of job a young lawyer dreams about. The pay was low (\$2,800 to start) and the working conditions were rugged.

"The offices were crowded and very hot in the summer," Thomas E. Harris, Nixon's first boss at OPA. "Out in the bays where Nixon was, there was no air-conditioning and the temperature ran around 110."

Harris is now general counsel of the AFL-CIO and more or less on the other side of the political spectrum from his former employe. Understandably, he takes a dim view of Nixon's unhappiness with price controls.

"NIXON COULDN'T have worked on price control for more than a week or two—and that experience was at a fairly low level—before he was transferred to work on tire rationing. So when he refers to his experience at OPA on price control, he's giving you the old stuff. As an exceedingly junior lawyer, he would never have been in an important conference on prices."

Though Harris was never close to Nixon, he remembers him as "conscientious, hard-working, rather shy and self-effacing. I think he was probably considerably less sophisticated than a good deal of the staff."

For his own part, Nixon felt something of an outsider among the largely liberal OPA staffers. In later years, he spoke often of his "disillusionment" with government bureaucracies, of

the "mediocrity of so many civil servants," and he disapproved strongly of "the remnants of the old, violent New Deal crowd."

BUT THERE WERE a few kindred souls in the OPA and Nixon found companionship. He was particularly close to J. Paul Marshall, a Yale law graduate who is now with the American Association of Railroads and a director of the Washington Redskins pro football team.

"We were young lawyers, the same age and probably the only two who were so-called conservatives," Marshall remembers. "A number of the others at the time were quite far to the left, so we had a closer natural bond."

Nixon stayed half a year at OPA, got several advancements and was making nearly \$6,000 when he left to join the Navy. Subsequently, and in speech after speech, he harked back to the experience as all the proof he needed that controls do not

work. On October, 17, 1969, for example, he told a nationwide television audience:

"My own first job in government was with the old OPA, and from personal experience let me say this: wage and price controls are bad for business, bad for the workingman and bad for the consumer. . . and I will not take the nation down that road."

BUT TIMES CHANGE and so, now and then, do the strongest-held opinions. People change, too, and few who knew Dick Nixon in 1941 could have foreseen his rise.

"We had quite a bright crew, and he was not exactly a shining light," says Ann L. Diamond, another OPA veteran who now practices law in San Rafael, Calif. "But he was very dependable and hard-working, and I must admit that he didn't try to fit into the mold by pretending to be a New Dealer."

Mrs. Diamond was bowled

over by Nixon's early political successes: "Did I ever think he'd run for public office? Heavens, no!"

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