

JUL 20 1970

Whither Are We Not Headed?

A remarkable document was mirthlessly released by the White House over the weekend, embodying results of prolonged meditation by a body described as the National Goals Research Staff. Its rather gross national product was factually and incisively summarized by James Naughton in *The Sunday Times*:

WASHINGTON July 18—A White House study on national goals has reached the conclusion that the White House cannot set goals for America.

* * *

According to the same dispatch, the study concluded that "the government instead should provide the information the public needs to engage in debate about the sort of society it wants . . . According to officials who took part in developing it, the report deliberately skirted the volatile issues confronting the nation today and was tailored to coincide with the President's policies."

It would be tempting to leave the matter there. No editorial comment can really surpass this description of high-pressure non-leadership.

Yet those who were at the beaches or mountain resorts remote from news reports yesterday may find these fragments implausible, and even allege that we have failed to provide the full flavor of the report.

It is true, for example, that Mr. Nixon, in setting up the National Goals Research Staff, admonished the group not to state goals but, as the report put it, "to inspire debate and help give that debate form, direction and meaning." Thus it might be said that from its inception the group was assigned the mission of discussing "national goals" without tipping its hand as to what such goals might be.

This delicate task was pitilessly entrusted to two men generally regarded as liberal voices in the Nixon set — Leonard Garment, special consultant to the President, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, counselor to the President. They were aided by Raymond A. Bauer of the Harvard School of Business. The

result will be sadly construed in some places as a caricature of the liberal in high places. We quote again from Mr. Naughton's account:

"The report avoided such controversies as those over racism, war, urban decay and minority dissent . . . The section on the consumer movement was edited to delete all references to Ralph Nader . . . One official who helped shape the document said that its frequent references to Mr. Nixon, his program and his public statements were designed 'not to promote the Administration but to convince the White House staff that the report was not at variance with the President's policies.'

"The same official said that the staff agreed with the White House that, for two principal reasons, it should not set specific goals. For one, events change too swiftly for a table of priorities to have much permanence. For another, unstated in the document, a list of goals would pose political problems for the Administration by setting up a yardstick against which to measure its success, restricting its options to make other decisions."

At a White House briefing prior to release of this exercise in evasion, Mr. Moynihan said that such a study could have been prepared by private research groups. "The purpose of doing it under the Great Seal," he explained, "is to make this kind of document available to the public for 95 cents." Alas, there is no indication that he smiled or winced when he said that.