


THE WHITE HOUSE  
WASHINGTON

Jan 15, 1970

Mr. Haldeman:

Is this the kind of thing  
the President has in mind?

  
Pat M.

Moynihan  
15 January 1970

At the end of the 1960's American government faced a crisis without precedent in our history. The authority of our laws, the legitimacy of our institutions, the integrity of our national purposes were under attack as never before. The withdrawal of confidence from our system of government was not confined to one group, or one section of the country, or one political point of view. To the contrary, this was a widespread, genuine crisis.

At heart, the issue was the effectiveness of government. Ours had become, as it continues to be and should remain, a society of large expectations. Government partook of those expectations: helping to generate them, and undertaking to meet them. Yet increasingly it proved unable to do so.

Some interpreted this lack of capacity as a lack of will. Government, they charged, did not truly wish to meet the needs and desires of the people.

Some judged the situation in even harsher terms. Government, they charged, was the oppressor of the people, was in truth the enemy to be destroyed.

These charges are still made. The rhetoric of disbelief, of disenchantment, of rejection has not faded. In some instances it has

become even more intense. Yet for the nation as a whole a new understanding of our situation seems to be taking over from the confusion and uncertainty of the recent past. We begin to see the need for fundamental reform of the institutions and processes of government. We begin to see that the failures of the past have come about because the way we have tried to do things had not kept pace with the things we have tried to do.

A society with large expectations must be a society continuously adapting its institutions and processes to changed conditions.

We had not done that. We had gone along adopting ever more ambitious goals while ignoring the widening gap between what government promised and what it could deliver.

Now we see that as we enter the 1970's we should enter also a great age of reform of the institutions and processes of American government. We seek not to destroy, but to renew. Not to diminish our vision of the future, but vastly to enhance our capacity to shape and master that future.