

# The District's New Liaison Man In Difficult Role at White House

By BENJAMIN FORGEY  
Star Staff Writer

Stephen who?

Stephen Pollak, that's who.

A lot of people were asking this question and getting, just about, this answer last January when President Johnson announced the name of the brilliant young lawyer he appointed to succeed Charles Horsky as the White House adviser on National Capital Affairs.

Pollak was unknown to many in the confusing array of agencies, departments and congressional committees which make up the government of the District of Columbia. He was unknown also to many outside this governmental circle who make it a point to know what's going on in the District.

Nevertheless, those who knew Pollak before his appointment as the District's man in the White House contend he is the ideal man for the job.

The 38-year-old attorney possesses the kind of virtues which produce encomiums from former bosses who want to—indeed, have to—get things done. Pollak's jumps from job to job on the establishment ladder have been both rapid and sure-footed.

## East to School

Born to a large family in the Chicago suburbs, Pollak went east to school and was Phi Beta Kappa as a junior at Dartmouth. After three years in the Navy, during which he served as a deck officer of a destroyer patrolling waters off Korea, Pollak enrolled in law school at Yale. There, he won the Jewett Prize for highest grades in his second year and was managing editor of the Law Journal.

Good family, good school, good service, beautiful grades: When Pollak received his law degree from Yale in 1956, the world, in a manner of speaking, was his.

What he did with it was this: He joined Covington & Burling, the Washington law firm of which Dean Acheson is a partner, in which there is a surfeit of bright young lawyers, from which numerous attorneys have graduated into important government positions.

Why Washington? Well, "Steve always had a great interest and desire to be in public service," according to Gerhard Gesell, a C&B partner with whom Pollak worked closely for some time. "He told

us that from the beginning . . . and were we sorry to lose him."

## Plum Job

Pollak left the firm in November, 1961, to take a plum job in the Solicitor General's office in the Justice Department. When a slot becomes available in this exclusive preserve, the chief always has a long list of high caliber, law-review-type candidates to choose from. Former Solicitor General Archibald Cox picked Pollak from the list, or, as Cox put it, "I stole him from Dean Acheson's law firm."

Then Pollak served as legal counsel to the presidential task force which shaped legislation for the war on poverty early in 1964, and, after Congress adopted the measure, he became first deputy general counsel at the Office of Economic Opportunity.

Not long thereafter, however, John Doar, soft-spoken chief of the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department, let it be known he was in the market for a first assistant. Cox admits that he had "no little to do with selling the idea" that Pollak be brought back to the Justice Department to fill the post. Pollak served in this important capacity from March, 1965, until he was appointed to the President's staff last January.

## Combined Qualities

What are the qualities which tend to extract such rave reviews from so varied and prestigious a collection of bosses? First, there is a well-trained, precise legal mind. "Pollak," Doar says, "gets a problem and analyzes it, and you can depend on his analysis." Second, there is a capacity to get along with people and to manipulate bureaucracies. The two do not necessarily go together, but Pollak, Cox remarks, "has the kind of energy in getting things done you don't always find in a good appellate lawyer."

This, of course, speaks highly of Pollak's ability and ambition, but does not necessarily spell success in what in many ways is the most difficult government assignment he has landed so far: The hours are long; the problems, large; the authority, small; the penalties for mistakes, stiff; the criticism, loud; the aggravations, many. Some have raised questions about how well and how deeply Pollak knows the problems of the District and environs.

Does he know enough about

the District and its needs?

"Yes," Horsky says. "Steve took a lot of interest in community affairs. He knew a lot of people around the city, just the kind of people he'd have to know to do a good job." Pollak first met his predecessor at Covington & Burling, where Horsky was a partner before accepting the White House post. Horsky, obviously, was one of Pollak's principal boosters for the job: "Oh, I was all for him."

"Yes," says James Banks, executive director of the United Planning Organization, Washington's anti-poverty agency. "I knew and worked with him when he was with W.P.H.A. (the Washington Planning and Housing Association, a private, liberal housing group which also was a training ground for Horsky.) He knows and understands the great problems of the District." (Pollak, incidentally, at one point served as president of W.P.H.A., as had Horsky before him.)

"Yes," said the Rev. Walter Fauntroy, chairman of the Coalition of Conscience, "I first met him when he was with the W.P.H.A., and he impressed me at that time with his sensitivity to the housing problems of poor people in general and Negroes in particular. And he was particularly helpful to me when he was with the Justice Department, during the voting rights crisis in Selma."

"I don't know him," says Julius Hobson, the director of ACT who almost is institutionalized as a militant civil rights leader in the District. Horsky was "too cautious" for Hobson, who says, "Maybe it's just that kind of job."

## Started in 1962

The job is "just that kind." When he created the post in the summer of 1962, President Kennedy made a point of saying the job was not to supplant the District Commissioners, but to assist them. Nevertheless, Horsky (he was the first appointee) drew quite a bit of criticism in his tenure, much of it emanating from the District Building, to the effect that he was grabbing the limelight ("He went around town talking like a mayor," one critic remarked) and cutting off direct communication between the District Commissioners and the White House.

There are many who feel that Horsky was unjustly accused in D-18

this respect, that in effect President Kennedy wanted to use the post as a platform for ideas to stir up a little activity. And there are many who feel that President Johnson views differently both the job and the holder, emphasizing the mediating, and the expediting that's there to be done and the information that's there to be collected and passed along. More than one person suggested that Johnson explicitly told Pollak to stay behind the scenes.

Some persons—mostly those who asked, "Stephen who?"—viewed Pollak's appointment, then, as a conscious effort on the part of the President to change the nature of the job or simply to destroy it in all but name. The President made it clear, however; he'll use Pollak's staff talents for more than just the tangled problems of the District.

Pollak also was told to "handle a wide-range of national urban affairs, working with Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Robert Weaver." Secretary Weaver said last week that though "it hasn't quite jelled as yet, it's evolving," and that Pollak most likely will be the White House in this field.

## Out of His Way

In any event, Pollak is going out of his way not to open himself to the kind of carping criticism which seems to be endemic in the District's complicated governmental arrangement where big job titles are easy to find and real authority, much more difficult. Last week, for example, Pollak was seen slipping unobtrusively into a House District subcommittee hearing. He sat quietly with other spectators, almost unnoticed, and observed as Walter Tobriner, president of the District Board of Commissioners, testified on the District Crime Commission report.

In refusing to grant an interview to this reporter, Pollak said: "It's just how I conceive of my responsibilities. I'm not to advise the President and I don't think that part of my responsibilities are to be a public figure." End of interview.

"It's a difficult thing to walk into all of a sudden," Horsky remarks. "It's one of those six-days-a-week, 10-to-12-hours-a-day type jobs." Horsky "sort of tapered off" on the job, he says, helping Pollak to learn his way around while he, Horsky, got



back into the swing of private law practice.

### First Big Test

One of the things Pollak walked into all of a sudden is the President's plan for reorganizing the District government, probably the most complicated, delicate and politically hot problem to come up in the District since the struggle over home rule in 1965.

The plan calling for replacing the three District Commissioners with a single mayor-commissioner and nine-member council, first was outlined in a special message to the Hill on Feb. 27, and it can be assumed Horsky did a lot of the spadework on the message. The proposal cannot be changed by Congress because it comes under the President's power to reorganize the executive branch. Thus an objection on even the most picayune of points by a key man in Congress could mean defeat for the entire measure—and there have been objections on points more than picayune.

Formal submission of the plan to Congress was expected several weeks ago, but the bill has yet to arrive on the Hill. The White House, obviously, is having its share of trouble getting the measure into shape. The coming struggle over reorganization will be a genuine time of trial for Stephen Pollak.

For the rest, the issues one gets involved in are as numerous and as perplexing as the problems which confront any major city today, "multiplied by six," Horsky remarks. The multiplier factor, it has been noted, is that frequently in the District it's less a question of getting the man who can do it to do it, but of persuading the man who can stop it not to stop it.

Obviously, the job calls for a tactician who is tactful in high degree, a person with iron nerves, a resolute constitution and thick skin, someone who is relaxed, generous, brilliant, persuasive, committed, and, perhaps, loving, kind and good. Stephen J. Pollak is not THAT man, but then, nobody is.

### Family Man

Lawyers in C&S, the Solicitor General's Office and the Civil Rights Division, civil rights leaders, and community volunteers who worked with Pollak before he accepted the present job are convinced Pollak has, in reasonable mixture, the things



STEPHEN POLLAK

the job requires. They say he is a skillful politician—some said "careful" and some said "cautious"—a good diplomat, a cool head, pleasant, serious capable, diligent, and, as one female who worked with him on a community organization put, "a real sweet guy."

A skier and a family man, Pollak often packs up his whole brood (Linda, 12, David, 11, Roger, 7, Ebe, 5, and wife, the former Ruth Barbara Scheinfeld) and heads north during the snow season. Horsky's incredible assortment of pipes are gone from the first-floor corner office in the Executive Office Building ("nicest office in Washington, except for the President's," Horsky says). Pollak has re-

placed them with drawings his kids made in school.

The family lives on the tree-lined streets of Cleveland Park, in a two-story stucco home at 3314 Newark St. NW, and has lived there for 10 years, since Pollak joined C&B.

Pollak has been on the job for two months, too little time to evaluate his effectiveness. The point is that to the Democratic establishment and liberal community in Washington, Pollak believes in the right things, and furthermore, he has that impressive legal and administrative background. Those who don't know him, and those experienced in the ways of the District, are waiting and watching with interest.