

Books of The Times

By Christopher Lehmann-Haupt

THE ENDS OF POWER. By H. R. Haldeman. With Joseph DiMona. 326 pages. Illustrated. Times Books. \$12.95.

CERTAINLY the "pseudo-psychologists" were always ludicrously at sea in their analyses of Richard M. Nixon, says former White House Chief of Staff, H. R. Haldeman, in his woodenly written but revelation-studded account of the Watergate scandal, "The Ends of Power." But not even two men who knew Mr. Nixon "almost as well and almost as long as I did" were able "to hit the nail on the head" in their assessments of the former President's character. He is not a cake composed of light and dark layers, as the former White House speech-writer William Safire described him. Nor is he what another speech-writer, Ray Price, compared him to—a battlefield on which light and dark forces waged constant war with one another. No, what Mr. Nixon really is, says Mr. Haldeman—are you ready for this?—is "a multifaceted quartz crystal" made up of some facets that are "bright and shining" and others that are "dark and mysterious." Pseudo-psychologists of the world, take that!

This metaphor—which proves useless to its creator in any case, since he refers throughout the remainder of his book to Mr. Nixon's dark and light sides as if there were only the two of them—would be merely laughable in its superficiality and incongruity if it weren't so at odds with everything else in Mr. Haldeman's book. True, he would have us believe that all is as clearcut as crystal. Take his assessment of the Watergate scandal, for instance, the details of which have been making all the headlines but are far from the substance of what Mr. Haldeman has to say.

His final judgment of the breakin to the Democratic National Committee headquarters boils down to approximately this. It was really nothing at all, because first, there was nothing to be gotten from an office that was really only window-dressing; second, every other Presidential administration going back to at least John F. Kennedy engaged in the same sort of "political" skirmishing; third, the energies expended in dealing with its consequences represented a tiny fraction of those put out by the Nixon Administration, most of which went into making the Presidency stronger, the country more prosperous, and the world a safer place to live in and finally it didn't hurt anyone except those who perpetrated it.

Points He Stresses

True, he goes on to argue that a great President was eventually done in by the scandal Watergate created because first he and his people (including Mr. Haldeman) mishandled their response to it; second, Nixon's efforts to end the Vietnam war and to streamline the organization of the executive branch of office, served to threaten his

enemies, and third, these enemies—namely Communist-inspired peace protesters, the news media, the Federal bureaucracy, the Congress and, most of all, the intelligence-gathering community—exploited Watergate to bring Mr. Nixon down.

But the points that Mr. Haldeman repeatedly stresses are that "in the days when . . . Watergate . . . was happening, it was only a very small blip on the overall radar screen of White House activity, interest, and concern," and that to write a book devoted almost exclusively to the affair is to focus on the tiny eye of a fly, which

"can appear terrifying when viewed through a powerful microscope." Yet the fact remains that he has written a book focusing powerfully on the eye of the fly, and in so doing he has speculated not only that the order for the tapping of the Democratic National Committee Chairman Lawrence F. O'Brien's telephone was issued from the Oval Office, but also that Mr. Nixon himself may well have ordered the breakin to the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist, as well as the tapping of the newspaper-columnist Joseph Kraft's telephone, and that it was he who erased the famous 18½ minutes of tape-recording. The final impact of such a book scarcely leaves Watergate looking like a small blip on a radar screen or Richard Nixon like anything as inanimate or even semi-precious as "a multifaceted quartz crystal."

Or take Mr. Haldeman's account of his relationship to the quartz crystal. He would have us believe that it is clean-cut enough. He argues that Mr. Nixon's light facets far outnumber the dark ones. He presents himself as a loyal Roman soldier who willingly fell on his sword when the time came to do so. He implies that he wrote this book because he was disappointed with the Nixon-Frost television interviews and felt the record should be set straight, if only to clear the way for future historians to judge the aborted greatness of the Nixon Presidency.

Yet he has written a book that is for the time being very damaging to Mr. Nixon. When he turns to the "lighter" side of Mr. Nixon's character, he describes things that, if different, are darker than the facets on the "darker" side. The swords he repeatedly falls on keep turning out to be rubber ones, off which Mr. Haldeman bounces onto the body of his fallen leader. The effect of the whole is to provide much matter for the pseudo-psychologists and nothing at all for the stone-cutters.

The Question of Motive

Why did Mr. Haldeman write "The Ends of Power" with its curious title

that raises the question of whose ends are being served here? Some will agree with the author that he is simply setting the record straight—and so he may be with a vengeance: the details on Watergate are fascinating, highly plausible, and go a long way toward clearing up certain central mysteries. Others will say he is merely exonerating himself—that he is not only minimizing his admitted culpability, but also attempting to dispel his image as a ruthless, power-loving "Teuton." Still others will cry that he is only getting revenge on his former master—that for all his protestations of loyalty to the President, he profoundly resented Mr. Nixon's obsession with me, me, me. And still others will sneer that the book was written to make money (and that despite Mr. Haldeman's claim that "no one other than those who brought . . . the Watergate breakin . . . about was personally hurt by it in any way," its profits ought to go to the American people.)

The motives of "The Ends of Power" seem to me so multiple and at cross-purposes with one another that I wouldn't know what to agree with. But the book certainly goes to show that H. R. Haldeman was not the robot-computer he says he tried to make of himself in his capacity as Mr. Nixon's "no-man." And that there is more to the most ordinary human being than there is to a piece of rock.