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NIXON GETS TOGETHER WITH PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELLOR ANNE ARMSTRONG

THE PRESIDENCY/HUGH SIDNEY

Trying to Grasp the Real Nixon

A clear picture from inside Richard Nixon's White House never quite emerges from the shadows. Now and then there are tantalizing glimpses of a man different from the one generally portrayed, but they are obscured by a manufactured smoke-screen that rises from Nixon's doubts about what he does and says and his suspicions of even those who get close enough to watch him.

The President stood in the East Room last week, earnestly recounting to Americans on television how he had told his aides not to pay hush money to the Watergate burglars. But for all these months, he has refused to make public the tape or a transcript of that fateful meeting last March 21 so that those who have questions about the incident can decide for themselves.

Last January, Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott rushed out of the White House and made headlines with the announcement that he had seen documents that would prove Nixon innocent of charges that the President knew about the Watergate cover-up. But those documents remain locked in White House vaults.

Recently, Republican National Chairman George Bush came from a White House meeting with Nixon insisting that the President was informed, realistic, aware of his own peril and concerned about the burden he was to the Republican Party. "He was very good." Then almost angrily Bush wondered aloud why that image of an open, intelligent leader was never picked up beyond the White House fence. But Bush, like most of the others who gather round the President, would say no more. The hard specifics of the meeting, the give and take between men that shows how a President's mind works and how policy is made were kept secret.

Presidential Counsellor Anne Armstrong met with the President to tell him of worry about the fall elections. Her report: Nixon was "on top of his job." He had the facts, and "he is a very clear-thinking realist." But even her enthusiastic portrayal of the President blurred into generalities. "He thinks we will be out from under the energy crisis, the economy will be on the upturn..."

Last week, in the aftermath of the Ohio and California congressional elections, Deputy Press Secretary Ken Clawson lamented that so few persons could perceive, as he did, Nixon's voter appeal, the solid base of support for him still round the nation. "I wish just one candidate would run as an out-and-out Nixon man," he said. But Clawson's view of Nixon remains confined to the cool, ordered corridors where the President's staff members dwell. There are few men on the Hill who have got this appealing picture of the man in the Oval Office.

All Presidents put on special acts for their staffs and their visitors. And the aura of the office still subdues people, still reduces the critical faculties of those who come into the epicenter. In these days, about the only people allowed the special view of the President are the ones who already are Nixon boosters. They are caught in the presidential spell, which is part awe and part fear, and the realities of Nixon and his life in the White House that might give him a third dimension are never carried out of the office.

Not long ago, after one of those White House meetings in which Nixon's qualities of leadership were glowingly described by his aides, a powerful member of Congress who attended and who still retained a steely eye was asked about the session. "It was," he said, "the worst one I've been to. The President was garrulous, and he couldn't stick to the subject. He interrupted almost every discussion with personal reminiscences that didn't have much to do with our business. I came away feeling that we had not talked very seriously about serious affairs." It is one of the quirks of this strange time that seeing Nixon struggle realistically with himself and events in this manner might add some believable dimensions to the synthetic image that he has created and burdens him so much in his larger battle for survival.

POLITICS

Cleaning Up Campaigns

Watergate's most positive result may well be reform of U.S. campaign laws. Since the scandal began, scores of bills have been filed in Congress to end corrupt election practices. Without mentioning Watergate, President Nixon last week outlined his own recommendations for curbing what he delicately called "campaign abuses recently publicized and of years gone by." The eight-page message read like a list of campaign abuses charged to Nixon's own political associates. The President's main points:

CAMPAIGN FINANCE. Nixon would limit individual contributions to \$15,000 for a presidential election and \$3,000 for a congressional election. Because the limits apply separately to primaries, run-offs and general elections, a person could give up to \$30,000 to a presidential candidate and \$9,000 to a congressional candidate. The President would prohibit cash contributions of more than \$50 and any loans or gifts of stock to candidates, and would permit candidates to have only one political committee each, to prevent them from using dummy committees to conceal the size and source of donations.

CAMPAIGN PRACTICES. The President also would make into federal crimes many "dirty tricks" in presidential and congressional elections. Among them: disseminating false instructions to workers, organizing slander campaigns, and rigging opinion polls.

Nixon urged the parties to move the national political conventions from the traditional July-August dates to September. His purpose is to shorten campaigns. He also proposed repeal of the "equal time provision" in order to permit TV and radio networks more flexibility in providing free time to major candidates.

Though many of the President's ideas are sound, Congress will probably not pay much attention to them because Nixon's intentions are suspect on Capitol Hill. Senator Edward Kennedy called the message a "thinly veiled attempt by the President to obstruct or even kill the most effective response Congress has yet made to Watergate." Nixon implied that he would veto the public-financing measures, which have drawn support from Congress despite presidential opposition.

The Senate Rules Committee last month approved a bill to ban all private contributions to candidates receiving public financing in a general election. The bill would provide about \$24 million from federal income tax return checkoff revenues for the campaign of each major party's presidential candidate in 1976. The full Senate will probably debate the bill later this month, while the House may accept a plan to use checkoff money to match private gifts to presidential campaigns.

TRIALS

"Mr. Stans, Here Is Your Currency"

Day after day, while beads of sweat slowly formed on his great bald head, the Government's witness told an absorbing story of how big money could buy influence at the highest levels of Richard Nixon's Administration. Harry L. Sears, head of Nixon's re-election drive in New Jersey and onetime majority leader in the state senate, was testifying in a Manhattan courtroom against the men with whom he claims to have done shady business: John Mitchell, 60, the former U.S. Attorney General; and Maurice Stans, 65, the former U.S. Secretary of Commerce. They are the first Cabinet officers since the scandals of Warren Harding's Administration to be charged with criminal offenses.

Sears was called to the stand by federal prosecutors, who are attempting to prove that Mitchell, once Nixon's top political strategist, and Stans, who raised

the money that made the campaigns purr, had struck the sleaziest of bargains with a notorious financial manipulator, Robert Vesco. The Securities and Exchange Commission has charged that Vesco was the central figure in perpetrating a \$224 million stock fraud, the largest single case in SEC history. In its case against Mitchell and Stans, the Government argues that Vesco made a secret, illegal contribution of \$200,000 in cash to the President's campaign in 1972, and that in return, the two Nixon lieutenants used their political clout—though both had left the Government by that time to work on the President's re-election campaign—to try to ease Vesco's troubles with the SEC.

In His Pocket. Vesco was also named in the 46-page indictment, which charged the defendants with conspiracy, obstructing justice and perjury, but he is a fugitive living in Costa Rica. The fourth man named was Sears himself, but he has been granted full immunity in return for testifying as a witness for the prosecution.

Sears was Vesco's man—"he was in Vesco's pocket," as a federal prosecutor bluntly put it. Vesco had contributed \$20,000 to Sears' unsuccessful attempt to win New Jersey's Republican gubernatorial primary in 1969, then helped him to pay off his campaign debts. Vesco also put Sears on a \$60,000-a-year retainer as part-time counsel and a director of his International Controls Corp., which had taken over Investors Overseas Services, the rickety mutual-fund empire glued together in Switzerland by Bernard Cornfeld.

The SEC began in 1971 to nose into Vesco's operations abroad. Sears said that he tried for months to persuade his old political friend John Mitchell to help Vesco get access to William Casey, then

the SEC chairman, so that the financier could plead his case in person. Mitchell appeared sympathetic, but nothing happened, though Sears pointed out that Vesco had made a substantial contribution to Nixon's 1968 election campaign and that "he represented himself as being close to the Nixon family."

Indeed, Vesco was acquainted with the President's two brothers, Edward, 43, and F. Donald, 59, and the latter's son, Donald A. Nixon, who has worked as an aide to the moneyman.

On March 8, 1972, said Sears, Vesco met with Maurice Stans and offered to give \$250,000 to the President's re-election campaign—\$200,000 secretly to Stans and \$50,000 openly. Sears testified that Stans wanted the money before April 7. On that date, a law came into effect that for the first time required a fund-raising committee—like the one headed by Stans—to publicly report contributions of \$100 or more. Stans also wanted the \$200,000 in cash, which proved to be awkward for Vesco to raise. In late March, said Sears, Edward Nixon visited the financier in New Jersey. During the visit, Vesco learned that Stans was on a flight to New York City's LaGuardia Airport. Vesco dispatched Nixon by helicopter to intercept the fund raiser and ask permission for the gift to be made by check. But, said Sears, Stans still insisted upon cash.

Wants Help. On April 10 Sears and Laurence Richardson, president of Vesco's company, called on Stans at his office at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. Sears testified that Richardson plunked down a dark leather briefcase, opened it, tilted it forward, and said: "Mr. Stans, here is your currency." He added: "Mr. Vesco wants me to deliver a message. He wants help." Replied Stans, according to Sears: "Tell him that's not my department... That's John Mitchell's department."

Sears went on to relate how Mitchell immediately began to perform services for Vesco. At a meeting with

FUGITIVE VESCO IN COSTA RICA



MITCHELL READS OF "PLUMBERS' " INDICTMENTS WHILE LEAVING HIS OWN TRIAL IN NEW YORK



SEARS GOING TO U.S. COURT TO TESTIFY

