

Capitol Punishment

Shultz,

Meet

Ellsberg,

Proxmire,

Schorr...

By Art Buchwald

If anyone doubts we have a different kind of regime in the White House than we had a year ago I refer them to the events of last week.

Mel Laird, the President's chief adviser for domestic affairs, mentioned a possible tax raise in a press conference. An angry Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz complained that every time he leaves the country Laird gives a press conference on economic affairs. He said, and the world quoted him, "I think the President's adviser for domestic affairs can keep his cotton-picking hands off economic policy for a change."

Now the beauty of this exchange is that with the new team in the White House, George Shultz could say such a thing about the President's chief adviser for domestic affairs without fear of being bugged, burgled and banished by the President's top aides.

Had John Ehrlichman been in charge of domestic affairs the script might have been entirely different.

After Shultz held his press conference in Tokyo, Ehrlichman could have called up Charles Colson and asked, "What have we got on Shultz?"

"Nothing so far, except that he's the Secretary of the Treasury."

"Did you see what he said about me in Japan? He said I should keep my cotton picking hands off the economy."

"What cheek! Should we put him on the enemy list?"

"We have to do more than that, I think this is a job for the plumbers."

(Enter Egil Krogh and his plumbers.)

"Eg! I want a psychiatric profile on George Shultz. Break into his psychiatrist's office and bring me back his files."

"Suppose he doesn't have a psychiatrist?"

"Then I'll call the CIA and tell them to make one up."

"This is a matter of urgent national security."

"How's that?"

"He called me a cotton picker."

"I got you, John. Let's go, plumbers. We have to save the country again."

"Miss Blatford, send in John Dean."

(Enter John Dean.)

"Dean, the President wishes you to personally investigate George Shultz. I want to know where he goes at night, whom he sees and what he does when he isn't fighting inflation. After you get the information, go to Camp David and write up a full report."

"Yes sir, John, I'll call Pat Gray right away and get the FBI on it."

"Also tap Shultz's telephone. He's trying to mortally wound me."

"Don't worry. I will launch the most thorough investigation in the history of the White House."

"Miss Blatford, get me Bob Haldeman."

"Bob, this is Ehrlichman. Did you see what Shultz said about me in Tokyo? . . . Right. Don't worry I've already taken care of it. Dean is launching an investigation. . . . When we get the goods on Shultz we'll leave him twisting slowly, slowly in the wind. Does the President know anything about Shultz's press conference on taxes? . . . Good. Don't tell him. . . . The less he knows about anything the better it is for the country."

That might have been how it would have gone if John Ehrlichman had still been in charge of domestic affairs. But fortunately Mel Laird is running things in the White House and Shultz has nothing to fear. Thanks to a new mood in the administration, calling a White House aide a cotton picker is no longer considered a capital crime in Washington.