

A Kindly Mitchell

Amiable New Image Emerges At Rare Press Conference

7/15/70 By Haynes Johnson
Washington Post Staff Writer

In that wonderful way of Washington, now there is another political phenomenon to ponder.

John Mitchell, that supposedly fearsome represser of radical rhetoric, has been transformed into a good guy of American government. At least that's the picture that emerged clearly yesterday when the President's lawyer, as his wife Martha likes to call him, met the press for the first time in exactly a year.

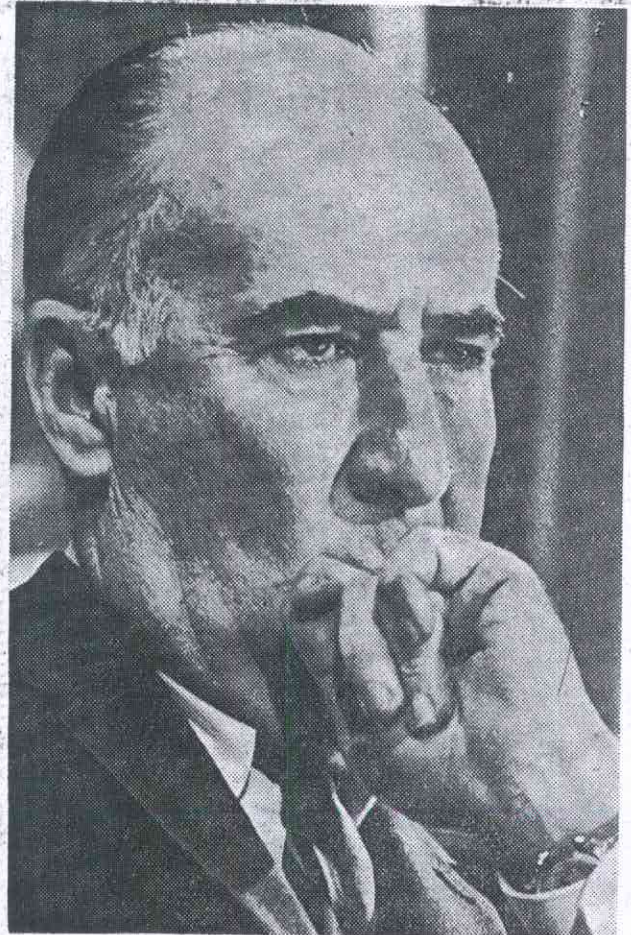
The Attorney General, holding court again on Bastille Day in the Great Hall of Justice, a place dominated by towering aluminum male and female statues of Justice, was a kindly and conciliatory figure. He had a good word for all—for blacks, for students, for dissenters, for Congress, for the Supreme Court, for individual rights.

To every question, about virtually every problem that has arisen in the last year, from Spiro Agnew's comments to Cambodia and the campuses, Mitchell responded with patience and humor.

He never—ever—raised his voice in anger. The closest he came to a rebuke was an arched eyebrow and a pained expression when a newsman flatly asserted that the Attorney General had been counseling the President on foreign policy moves.

When Sarah McClendon, a reporter with a penchant for asking needling and rhetorical questions, warned that she was going to give him a "long and involved" one, Mitchell said, "So what's new?" He said it softly and with a smile.

See MITCHELL, A9, Col. 1



By Bob Burchette—The Washington Post

John Mitchell: "We would like to have tranquility."

A Kindly Mitchell Meets the Press

MITCHELL, From A1

For the rest of the hour-long conference, the President's former law partner, a man with a reputation as the recluse of the administration, was clearly in command.

He fielded questions ranging from the 18-year-old vote to wiretapping to Black Panthers to impeachment proceedings against Justice William O. Douglas and political problems confronting the Nixon administration.

As he remarked lightly at one point, any good lawyer can take any side of a case and argue it with equal ability. But for Mitchell there was clearly only one client

to be defended yesterday—the administration. He presented that case in low key; if there were any problems, it was because of a misunderstanding of the administration's true motives.

"If the campuses as such look upon what we're doing as repressive it's because they're not getting the message," he said, in response to one question.

The same was true of certain spokesmen in the black community who have criticized the administration.

When asked if the administration was concerned about its ability to get through to the blacks, Mitchell answered, "Of course we are."

He also said: "We are trying to make our position more clear to them."

In the same vein, he spoke positively about the necessity to end discriminatory practices in Southern schools. Mitchell said he sees the day coming soon "when desegregation will be accepted as a fact of life" and the process of education can go forward.

He went on record as saying he thinks that time is fast approaching. After the 1970-71 school year, he said, "not only will the school districts in the South have converted" from dual to unitary systems, but "most of the irritants" produced by deseg-

regation "will be behind us..."

Mitchell said he doesn't believe many Southerners look at desegregation as a political matter any longer.

When someone coupled the President's pledge to bring the nation together with a reference to hard-hat demonstrations and other evidence of national division, Mitchell replied, "Of course we would like to have tranquility" in all sections and among all groups of America.

Other questioners tried to strike more personal responses growing out of the controversies of the past year. Was it true, a reporter wanted to know, that Mitchell had considered resigning from the Cabinet after G. Harrold Carswell's Supreme Court nomination had been rejected by the Senate?

"No," he said, "but there was always occasions when one wishes to be fired."

Was there any significance in his holding this press conference on Bastille Day?

"If you'd been out here last November," he said, referring to the anti-war demonstrators who congregated at the Justice Department, "you'd think it was the Bastille."

And, inevitably, there were questions about his wife and her remarks.

As is well known, Mitchell said, Martha Mitchell speaks for herself. He was unruffled by another question about the same subject.

After an hour, Mitchell broke it off. He got in the last word.

"Hurry back, you all," said Attorney General John Mitchell.

No Gains in D.C. Crime Fight Under Nixon, Mitchell Says

By Carl Bernstein

Washington Post Staff Writer

Attorney General John N. Mitchell said yesterday that no progress has been made in the fight against street crime in Washington since the Nixon administration took office.

The Attorney General's assessment differs from a statement by President Nixon, who, on May 23, said he was "very encouraged" at a purported downturn in the crime rate here.

Largely at the behest of the administration, the authorized strength of the metropolitan police department has been raised from 4,100 to 5,100 since Mr. Nixon's inauguration; actual manpower has increased by almost 800 men during the period, and special overtime patrols have been instituted with White House approval.

Asked yesterday if progress has been made since Mr. Nixon described Washington as the "crime capital of the world" during the 1968 presidential campaign, Mitchell replied at his press conference:

"No. There has not been (any progress) . . . and that is why we anticipate with great delight final passage and sign-

ing" of the D.C. crime bill that was cleared by a congressional conference committee on Monday.

The legislation—parts of which have caused controversy—would authorize preventive detention for some suspects before trial; permit police to conduct no-knock searches; reduce from 18 to 16 the age at which juveniles charged with some crimes would be tried as adults; expand police wiretapping authority; provide five-year mandatory minimum sentences for persons convicted twice of armed crimes, and order a sweeping reorganization of the city's courts to speed and improve the administration of justice.

'It's a Good Bill'

Asked if amendments to the bill as originally drafted by the administration had affected his view of the legislation, Mitchell said:

"There have been some improvements and some limitations. By and large it's a good bill, and we're happy to have it."

The attorney general's assertion that no headway has been made—against street

crime here since the administration took office contrasts with recent assessments by Police Chief Jerry V. Wilson.

Offering statistics that showed a continuing decrease in the crime rate from one month to the next since December, Wilson said on May 21 that a "steady rate" of decline "appears to be an emerging trend."

The optimism was amplified by Mayor Walter E. Washington, who greeted the statistics with "satisfaction and pleasure . . . hope and optimism."

The day after newspaper accounts of the new "trend" appeared, President Nixon summoned the mayor and police chief to the White House for a meeting.

Calling reporters into his office, the President reported he was "very encouraged." According to the mayor's account of the meeting, the President said that "he was glad to see we were moving" on crime.

Monthly Decline Cited

The statistics cited by Mr. Nixon, the mayor and Wilson, however, show a decline only from one month to the next—from March, 1970, to April,

1970, for example. The total number or reported crimes in the first quarter of 1970 was 21 per cent higher than in the first quarter of 1969.

At his press conference yesterday, the attorney general said that "we're trying to put together the best piece of crime legislation we can" for the District of Columbia and indicated he believes such legislation must become law before any real drop in crime here can be recorded.

Much the same view was stated yesterday by Sen. Joseph D. Tydings (D-Md.), chairman of the Senate District Committee and one of the leaders of the House-Senate conference that finished work on the crime bill Monday.

Describing the bill as "the President's legislation to control the enormous crime plague ravaging our national capital," Tydings sent an unusual letter to newsmen, constituents and Washington civic leaders urging support of the package.

Tydings, who faces re-election this fall, said the "overwhelming bulk of this bill" deals with court reform, not the controversial revisions of the D.C. criminal code.