

Nixon's Decisions Held Only Way Out

5-11-73

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When President Nixon left the White House Friday night for Camp David, a White House aide said yesterday, he "knew what he had to do." That evening in Washington, Raymond K. Price, the dean of the White House speechwriters, began work on the address delivered by the President last night.

To the rest of the White House staff, Price's activity was the signal that the President's course had been set. On Sunday, H.R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman requested a meeting with the President, flew to Camp David and told Mr. Nixon they did not want to resign. But the President told them his decision was final.

White House officials who

advised and consulted with Mr. Nixon during the last few days said yesterday that his decision to part with Haldeman and Ehrlichman was probably the most difficult he has ever made.

Ironically, said these men, who now are among the President's closest advisers, the decision was virtually inevitable, forced on this most self-controlled President by events that had spun beyond his control.

When he went to Camp David, alone at first with his Irish setter, King Timahoe, the President "was still probably hoping for a way out," one aide said, "but he knew there wasn't one."

President Nixon made his decision under fire from

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leaders of the Republican Party, especially Republican National Committee Chairman George Bush. The President was urged to act by present Cabinet members, including Secretary of State William Rogers, and former Cabinet members Melvin Laird and John Connally.

According to one source, Murray Chotiner, the President's long-time campaign strategist, was urging a White House staff shakeup.

Inside the White House, special presidential consultant Leonard Garment, generally considered a liberal, and special assistant Patrick J. Buchanan, a conservative, were telling the President the same thing.

Then Mr. Nixon went to Camp David for what was thought to be a weekend of seclusion. It was learned yesterday that the President had had the following visitors at his country retreat:

Secretary of State Rogers, the new acting Attorney General Elliot Richardson,

Garment, speechwriter Price, White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, and three of the four men who resigned yesterday—Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Kleindienst.

Presidential counsel John W. Dean III did not go to Camp David and was informed only yesterday that the President wanted his resignation.

Dean, Haldeman and Ehrlichman will be former White House aides as they face the Senate Watergate investigating committee and the Justice Department prosecutors.

"They are no longer the President's men," explained one White House official. "They are naked."

One Republican senator who is generally considered favorable to the administration called a reporter yesterday to say that the President had made a courageous decision. "It was tough. He cut Haldeman and Ehrlichman off . . . we don't have the perspective to under-

stand what a disgrace that is . . . those two will not be going on the talk shows."

At the same time, government sources said yesterday there is a good chance that Haldeman and Ehrlichman may not be indicted. "But it is a personal tragedy," one knowledgeable Justice Department attorney said yesterday. "A tragedy for Haldeman, Ehrlichman, the President and Attorney General Kleindienst."

The President last spoke publicly about the Watergate on April 17, when he announced that there had been "major developments" in the Watergate investigation.

White House sources said there were three reasons for that announcement: The President wanted to seize control of an investigation that could get out of control, he wanted to offset the Senate's Watergate investigation—and he wanted to save Haldeman and Ehrlichman if at all possible.

But during the 13 days

there were continual allegations of involvement by high Nixon aides in the Watergate bugging and a subsequent coverage designed to hide that involvement.

The day the President spoke, a White House official told The Washington Post that Haldeman and Dean would have to resign sooner or later.

It was reported that former White House aide Jeb Stuart Magruder had testified to prosecutors and was implicating others, including Dean. Dean responded on April 19 saying that he would not become a Watergate "scapegoat."

Former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, who had constantly denied knowledge of the bugging, now said that he had discussed plans to bug the Democrats' Watergate headquarters three times last year but had always rejected the proposal.

Kleindienst disqualified himself from participating

in the investigation amid growing indications that Mitchell, a long-time associate, would be indicted.

Next it was learned that Haldeman and Ehrlichman were being investigated by the Watergate grand jury.

Syndicated columnist Jack Anderson printed verbatim grand jury testimony charging that Haldeman had set up a \$350,000 cash fund that apparently was used to pay the seven conspirators for their silence.

Last Thursday, it was revealed that acting FBI director L. Patrick Gray III, Ehrlichman and Dean were involved in the destruction of potential evidence in the Watergate case. Gray resigned the next day.

As one White House source described it: "It was too much. No one—the President and the Presidency could not take it."

One senior member of the White House staff said yesterday: "We're going through a transition of government. I can only com-

pare it to Dallas of November, 1963, when Kennedy was shot, or the initial takeover after the President was inaugurated in 1969."

While there was an intense feeling of relief among the President's staff and supporters that he had finally acted, at least three White House officials wondered aloud whether it came too late or did not go far enough.

"We were just about dead," said one presidential aide. "Now we're not dead, nor are we alive."

Another asked: "Should a special prosecutor have been appointed?"

A colleague answered that the President could not bring himself to appoint an independent investigator because it would acknowledge that the system of criminal justice had become so tainted that no Nixon appointee could do the job honestly.

Implicit in the resigna-

tions is the fact that they strip Haldeman and Ehrlichman of the last layer of protection separating them from the Watergate affairs, although the President stressed that the departure of Haldeman and Ehrlichman should not "at this time . . . be seen by anyone as evidence of any wrongdoing by either one."

Their resignations mean not only the loss of two close friends and most trusted aides, but also inevitably remove some of Richard Nixon's coveted isolation. In effect, the President's action brings him closer to the government, to the Cabinet officers and other White House staff members from whom the President had been shielded by Haldeman and Ehrlichman—often called the "Berlin Wall" because of their German descent.

One White House aide raised the darkest question himself: "It's also possible that the President thinks

Richardson and William D. Ruckelshaus will go a little easier than a special prosecutor if faced with the final mile. But they are two tough, honest guys."

The comment was indicative of the doubt and shattered confidence that has moved from Capitol Hill to the White House.

The elimination of Haldeman and Ehrlichman necessarily moves several people closer to the President, including foreign affairs adviser Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of the Treasury George Shultz, budget director Roy Ash, and head of White House congressional relations William E. Timmons.

Others expected to move closer to the center of White House power are press spokesman Ronald L. Ziegler, special presidential counsel Richard A. Moore, and special assistant Price, who assisted in drafting last night's presidential speech.