

The Inner Nixon Weighs Watergate

"But I have found that leaders are subject to all the human frailties: they lose their tempers, become depressed, experience the other symptoms of tension. Sometimes even strong men will cry."

Richard Nixon in "Six Crises"

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

The frailties of which Richard Nixon once wrote have been experienced by him in full measure in the three weeks since he fired Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox and plunged the presidency into what could be Mr. Nixon's final crisis.

We do not know whether he cried. But those who have had the opportunity to observe Mr. Nixon at close range during this period say he has been alternately preoccupied and irritable. More than once he has reiterated his anger about the "outrageous, vicious, distorted reporting" he complained about in his Oct. 26 news conference.

On one occasion he rebuked an aide who had allowed reporters to watch a presidential helicopter arrive on the White House lawn. On another he criticized both the media and Senate Democrats and declared:

"We're not going to turn the govern-

ment over to those who have been out to get us all along."

It has always been characteristic of Mr. Nixon that he prefers his own counsel in time of crisis. Before the Middle East war demanded his full attention, Mr. Nixon secluded himself in the Oval Office or in his hideaway office in the next door Executive Office Building. Sometimes he talked with chief of staff Alexander M. Haig Jr., with Press Secretary Ronald L. Ziegler

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President waits at Camp Davis for Monday meeting. Page A-4

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or with his longtime personal secretary, Rose Mary Woods. More often he worked and reflected alone.

This latest period of seclusion came to an end Nov. 1. With pressures for his resignation mounting and with the Middle East crisis seemingly in hand, Mr. Nixon left the White House and flew to Key Biscayne for a private dinner with his closest friend, Charles G. (Bebe) Rebozo.

Press Left Behind

It was the first time in the Nixon presidency that he had flown to Key Biscayne without giving White House reporters an opportunity to accompany him, but the trip was not a sudden decision. Instead, say White House aides, the trip was planned the previous day and Mr. Nixon purposefully left behind the press and even such trusted aides as Ziegler.

This account was confirmed by a Florida businessman who knows both Mr. Nixon and Rebozo and who says that Rebozo was expecting his arrival on Nov. 1.

According to the businessman, the President discussed the possibility of his resignation with Rebozo, who already had been quoted in the Miami Herald of that morning as saying that Mr. Nixon would never resign. The next day Deputy Press Secretary Gerald L. Warren reiterated in even stronger terms that Mr. Nixon had no

intention of quitting.

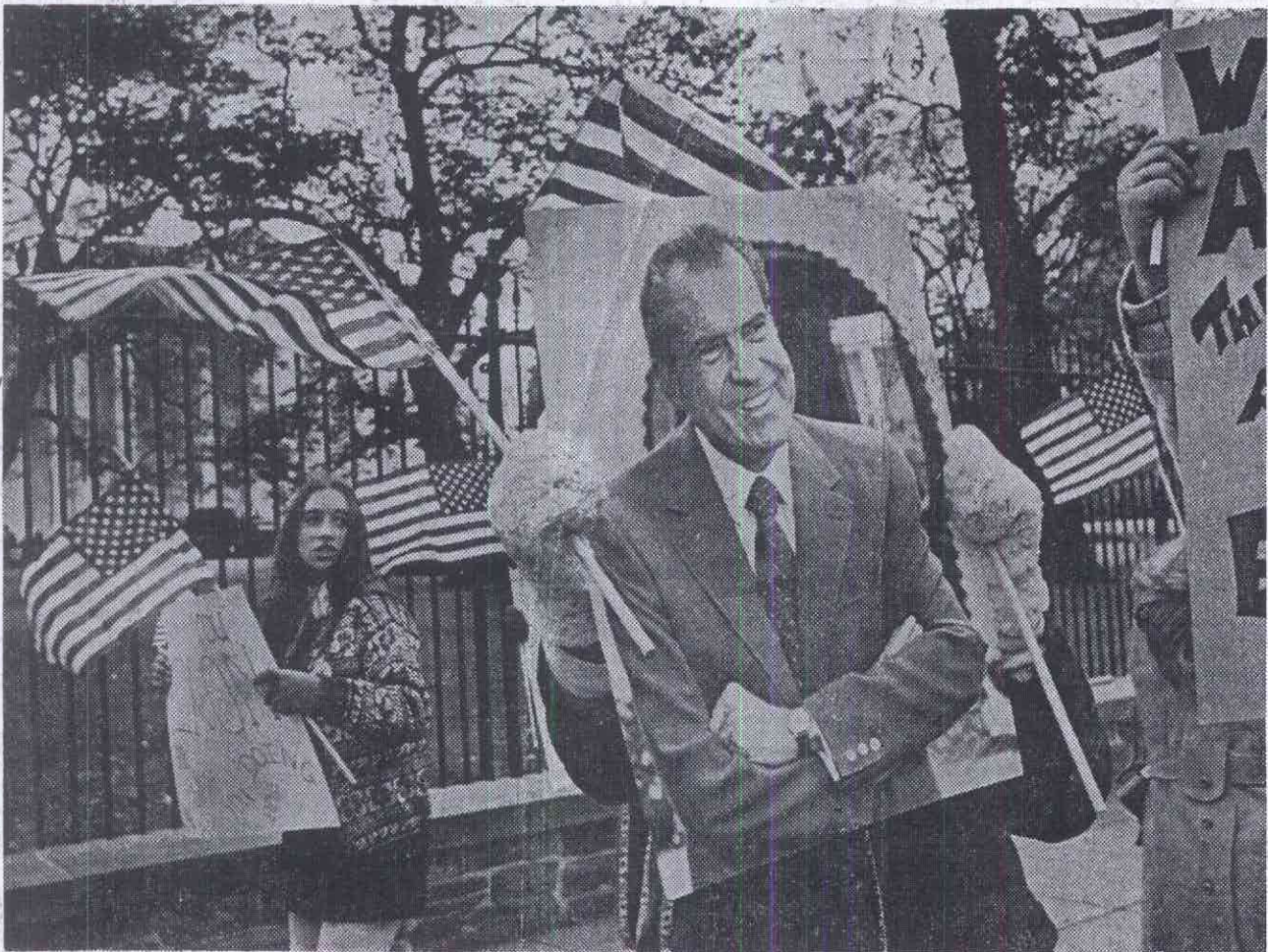
A White House aide in a position to know says that Mr. Nixon decided over the weekend in Key Biscayne that he must also make "a final attempt to set the record straight." Another aide says that this record-straightening attempt will include explanations of almost every scandal or purported scandal that has touched the White House.

These include statements about Mr. Nixon's tax writeoff for his vice presidential papers, the \$100,000 contribution given by Howard Hughes to Rebozo and subsequently returned, the allegation that the administration raised milk price supports in exchanges for campaign contributions and a "complete explanation" of the Watergate tapes.

If it is characteristic that Mr. Nixon's decision to speak out about the accusations against him was preceded by a period of seclusion, it is equally characteristic that he arrived at this decision in the presence of Rebozo and multi-millionaire industrialist Robert Abplanalp.

"Nixon listens to Rebozo and Abplanalp and they don't know anything about politics," says a politician who knows both the president and Rebozo.

This politician says that experience has demonstrated that it is best in politics to get a "lot of input" and that Mr. Nixon makes the "mistake" of getting very little.



By Margaret Thomas—The Washington Post

DEMONSTRATIONS—About 75 persons, most youthful, attended a rally to criticize the news media and support President Nixon yesterday in front of the White House.

Nearby, a rally by the National Socialist White People's Party to criticize the United States policy toward the Middle East attracted about 17 persons, park police said.

Haig and Ziegler now see almost as much of Mr. Nixon as H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman once did but there is no suggestion that either of them is as influential.

"Haig is consulted on foreign policy and respected, partly because of his long association with Henry (Kissinger), and the President likes Ron and values what he says about the press," says one White House aide. "But both of them together and everybody else in the place don't exercise the influence of a Haldeman."

Another aide points out that Mr. Nixon has always had the ability to "compartmentalize" problems. This aide says that Mr. Nixon has discussed legal problems with his lawyers; White House administration and foreign policy with Haig and politics and press policy with Ziegler and Bryce Harlow but he has rarely, if ever, held any coordinated policy discussion with any of these men.

He has used cabinet meetings and

sessions with congressional leaders to discuss pressing issues such as the Middle East war and the energy crisis but he has not unburdened himself on Watergate issues.

Onetime White House staffer Richard J. Whalen made this point two years ago in his book "Catch the Falling Flag" when he wrote that Mr. Nixon retreats "into impenetrable silence and seclusion" and added that "none of us could say with confidence what, if anything, Nixon felt passionately about."

Mr. Nixon has on occasion celebrated his own quality of introversion.

At a rare social gathering with White House reporters on the last day of his administration's second year the President volunteered that it is "a lot of nonsense that the presidency is the loneliest job in the world." Mr. Nixon said on this occasion that he is not isolated, that he knows what's going on and that he "can't be hoodwinked."

Now, with his popularity at its lowest ebb, Mr. Nixon has in effect, been

driven into explaining to the American public just how it was he was "hoodwinked" on Watergate by top aides in his own administration. While the exact form of the rebuttal he will make is still not firmly decided, it ap-

parently will include a new series of television speeches, statements and press conferences by the President and perhaps some "white papers" on various issues.

But Mr. Nixon's greatest difficulty as President, even when he was at the height of his popularity in the polls, has been in arousing public emotions in his behalf.

"I think Nixon knows a lot about government—about where power lies, but I don't think he's ever known how to get human emotions moving in his favor," says a former congressman who served with Mr. Nixon. "I don't ever remember Nixon as a fellow who could move crowds."

The President is known to believe, however, that he will be judged highly by history if he can somehow provide convincing answers to what he last week called the "deplorable Watergate matter."

"If someone will hypothetically take Watergate out of 1973—as history will do—1973 has been from an administration standpoint of accomplishment a very good year," Ziegler said in an interview.

Such a hypothesis seems somewhat akin to saying that the Titanic had a good voyage except for the iceberg, but Ziegler uses it to make a point about the administration record. He points to the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, the recently announced Middle East settlement, the ending of the draft, the beginning of a decrease in inflation and food prices and the reduction of unemployment.

It is this record that Ziegler is referring to when he talks about putting Watergate "in perspective." Ziegler and other White House spokesmen concede that many Americans will retain doubts about the Watergate affair no matter what the President's explanations may be, but they also insist that Mr. Nixon's overall record will eventually be judged much more positively by the American people than it is at present.

These same officials, including Ziegler, insist that Mr. Nixon is not talking about quitting and that he can govern even if he does not recover from his present low point.

In the long run, the strongest motivation for Mr. Nixon's continuance in office is his belief that he would be yielding to the judgment of his "adversaries"—the present White House word for what used to be called "enemies"—in stepping down. This belief does not appear to have been altered by the fact that many of Mr. Nixon's former supporters are among those who have called for resignation.

"Having the presidency changed because of these forces against him is something he believes should not be allowed to happen," says Ziegler. "A President in our system cannot just turn over the government to the opposition."

An examination of Mr. Nixon's record, however, shows that he often proclaims a course of action most strongly just before abandoning it.

"President Nixon has become a fast master at claiming victory while in the act of surrender," wrote UCLA Political Science professor Bernard Brodie last week in the Los Angeles Times. Brodie pointed to the contrast between Nixon statements and subsequent actions when the President ended the bombing in Vietnam, halted the incursion into Cambodia and released the Watergate tapes to Judge John J. Sica after saying he would not do so.

A similar point could be made about a host of administration actions during the Nixon first term, including presidential turnarounds on welfare reform and desegregation policies.

"I know I'm concerned about the President's ability to carry on indefinitely if his public support doesn't rise," said one senior White House official recently. "I think it will rise, and the President does, too. But we all know that it's now a struggle to survive."