

The Mood Of A President

Nixon 'Determined To Learn Lessons'

WASHINGTON (AP) — Coolness in crisis, he once wrote, comes after a "necessary period of indecision, doubt and soul-searching."

In the image the White House sought to project, that period of painful introspection was ending for Richard Nixon this week, although Watergate wasn't. His mood, aides said, was once more on the way up. It had a long way to go.

The bottom came two weeks ago. He was returning from the splendid isolation of the mountaintop at Camp David, where he spent the weekend facing up to the fact that his two most trusted assistants, H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman, would have to go.

Now, walking over the south lawn behind the White House, on the way to the television cameras waiting in his office, the President of the United States said to an aide:

"Walk with me . . ."

He noticed several reporters. " . . . Unless you feel it'll hurt you."

In his office, Nixon ended his Watergate speech with difficulty, and rose from his desk as a television technician said, "Good job, Mr. President." Richard Nixon, who prides himself on his self-control, lost it then. He wept.

The next morning, on the way to the cabinet room, the President noticed an FBI agent stationed outside of Haldeman's office. "That," says a man who was there, "was the bottom for the President."

Nixon vented his anger before the cabinet. He said it was "reprehensible" to have FBI men placed outside the offices of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, two men, he said, "who are not criminals and are basically decent and honest."

The President then flayed Sen. Charles Percy, the Illinois Republican, for pushing a Sen-

ate resolution for an independent outside investigation of Watergate.

"Percy," said the man now in the job, "will become President over my dead body."

The tears, the flashing anger, were the only moments, aides report, in which Richard Nixon lost his control in a fortnight of convulsive shocks that seemed, at times, to be unravelling a government.

Scattered talk of impeachment has brought no response, even in private, from the man who won the second largest landslide in history a few months ago, say the people around him. "I doubt," said one assistant, "that he takes it at all seriously; he'd expect some people to use the word just to make headlines."

With the spreading scandal and "the crisis of confidence" in his administration, does the President worry about his ability to govern?

"I think he feels there will be problems," said an assistant, "and that he's going to have to work hard on them, that he has to convince people the captain of the ship is alive and well, on the bridge."

"He knows he has to prove that he can come back, and, knowing him, I think he'll turn it into a challenge. He almost relishes challenges."

Until ten days ago, aides re-

port, Watergate had "drained the President physically and emotionally." He was sleeping much less, and looked it. Then a weekend in Florida — a moonlight cruise, the comfort of friends such as Charles "Bebe" Rebozo, the Florida financier and real estate operator, and Paul Keyes, former producer of "Laugh-In" — appeared to revive him.

The picture now offered of the President is that of a once more dynamic captain, back up from the lonely, painful reflection in his cabin, firmly again at the helm, issuing rapid, incisive orders to patch up the sails, plug the holes in the hull and put the ship back on course, though the storm still rages.

"The President is now devoting very little of his time" to Watergate, press secretary Ron Ziegler told reporters this week. " . . . The President is governing, he is leading and he intends to do so."

"He is definitely coming back in mood," said another presi-

From Watergate

dential assistant. "He is returning to his more aggressive self, and that's a good sign."

The President, who has called himself the "coach and quarterback" of his team, is also pictured in a week of tumultuous events and mixed metaphors as the man running up and down behind the tattered line, trying to revive the old fighting spirit.

He popped in on a staff meeting this week, talked of the goals of his second term that call for "extra effort," reminded them that they had been

through bad periods before and said, "We'll come out of this, too."

He told his changing Cabinet, reshuffled this week in a frantic version of musical chairs, that they must not be "deflected" or "consumed" by the distractions of Watergate, that they all must still work toward peace in the world, reorganization of government and solutions to energy problems.

"I have the responsibility," he said, "and so does every

See NIXON, Page C-5

NIXON

(Continued from Page C-1)

person in this room, not to let these opportunities be lost."

But now and then the suggestion of a somewhat chastened President slipped through.

"He is determined to learn whatever lessons can be learned from Watergate," said an assistant.

And so the President told both staff and Cabinet, in effect, that the "Berlin wall" built up between him and much of the rest of government by Haldeman and Ehrlichman is coming down, that henceforth he will seek to avoid the creation of sub-empires under him.

Henceforth, in the White House staff, there will be "lower profiles" and less "domination of personality." He said he now seeks "more openness" with both Congress and the press, and direct communications with every member of his Cabinet.

The President is now said to be reading newspapers more. Until recently, said a high administration source, he was relying on the news digests prepared for him for outside information on Watergate.

"Those digests," said the source, "were far from objective, and disparaged the mounting evidence and press accounts alleging White House wrongdoing."

In his one public appearance

outside the White House since Watergate became a tidal wave two weeks ago, the President came before a Republican fund-raising dinner in a Washington hotel. He was introduced by Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who hailed him as a man who has "returned reason and civility to public discourse."

The President rose. "I didn't get where I am by ducking the tough ones," he said. Also: "I do not stand here tonight as a loser . . . We're going to make the next four years our best four years." He also suggested the troubles of his administration could be equated with the sins of past administrations and campaigns.

The audience applauded. In words and gestures, it seemed to be vintage Richard Nixon — the pumping right arm, the body English, the nervous flutter of eyelids.

But in both speaker and audience, there appeared to be something missing — a crescendo that wouldn't soar, a fire slow to kindle.

The fund-raising evening produced half the funds expected.