

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

White House Gumshoe

WHEN THE White House switchboard was ordered three months ago to record the names of all incoming callers, the only unruffled White House staffer was W. Marvin Watson Jr., the presidential assistant who contrived this unusual tattle-tale system.

Watson did not even confide his plan to Bill D. Moyers, President Johnson's No. 1 assistant (who is exempted from the monitoring system). Presumably, only Watson and the President knew—and today know—the full reason behind the record-keeping of every outside caller and the assistant who is calling.

One assistant—McGeorge Bundy, the President's outgoing national security expert—wrote a no-nonsense memo to the President complaining that one of his personal civil rights was the right to receive phone calls in privacy from anyone he wanted.

Since then, the Watson system of keeping tabs on White House assistants has expanded. White House chauffeurs now turn in a complete log of every stop



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They make with a White House aide as passenger, now, the stop takes, the address, what other passengers may be riding with the White House assistant plus other details.

STILL ANOTHER source of intelligence, always available but seldom used by other Presidents, is the log of all White House entrances. It records every visitor, from Congressmen to cleaning women. These logs, which used to be filed in a dusty bin, now go to Watson for regular scrutiny.

The reason for all these gumshoe activities is ostensibly Watson's efficiency studies of White House work standards, triggered by President Johnson's well-

known drive to reduce expenditures. But Watson's background distorts this drive.

Watson is out of small-time big business (assistant to the president of labor-baiting Lone Star Steel Co. before joining the President) and has infused his new job with the enthusiasm of a nit-picking efficiency expert. Time studies, coffee breaks, paper-pushing and the like were understandable targets for routine efficiency attacks in Watson's earlier world of Lone Star Steel.

But the White House is not Lone Star Steel. The White House staff is no assembly-line of clock-punchers but highly respected experts covering the whole range of public affairs who work with amazing efficiency without overtime pay and without public praise.

Thus, for Watson to discover—as he has—that one assistant got only eight telephone calls in a 10-hour period, or had only three callers in two days, is scarcely evidence that the assistant isn't pulling his weight. And yet invidious comparisons like that are becoming a somewhat sour Washington joke.

WHEN THE new telephone monitoring system went into effect, we were informed it would last a short time. Its apparent purpose (although no one knew for sure) was only to measure the input of calls to various White House offices in preparation for a new switchboard system. But it immediately put every one in the White House on notice that Watson could know the identity of every person calling in.

Although Bundy was the only presidential assistant audacious enough to put his concern in writing, other White House staffers have felt a certain apprehension that Watson can at any time confront them with a list of every telephone caller from outside, and, in fact, construct from other records a fairly complete story of their outside life. It gives

them an unpleasant feeling of "Big Brother" watching.

Whether the President himself is aware of this is an open question. Although he keeps close touch with the comings and goings of his assistants, there is general agreement that Watson's checking up may have gone much farther than the President ever intended.

Watson, indeed, is a detail man of formidable dimensions. For instance, he personally has inspected, measured and approved every small detail of the new guardhouses now being placed at the White House gates.

This attention to detail was fine for Lone Star Steel. In the White House, it's out of place. And when it turns into gumshoe tactics, it's downright demoralizing.

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