

Capitol Punishment

Swearing In Major Major's Lieutenants

By Art Buchwald

My friend Cotswald, who was a "Democrat for Nixon," seemed very depressed when I found him in a bar the other day.

I asked him what the problem was.

"I've been watching the Watergate hearings all week," he said, "and it's got me down."

"Don't worry," I said trying to cheer him up, "it's John Dean's word against the President's. It's still quite possible that Nixon had nothing to do with Watergate or the coverup."

"That's just the point," Cotswald said. "Suppose Nixon didn't have anything to do with Watergate? The White House defense is that Nixon didn't know anything about anything. The whole country was being run by Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Wouldn't that depress you?"

"Well, it wouldn't make me happy," I admitted.

"I didn't vote for Haldeman and Ehrlichman," Cotswald said bitterly. "I voted for Nixon. If I had known he was going to turn over the presidency of the country to two flunkies I sure as hell would have thought twice about it."

"But President Nixon had the final say on all their decisions," I pointed out.

"We don't know that. From what we've heard, Ehrlichman and Haldeman gave orders to the Justice Department, the FBI, the CIA, the State Department

and everybody else.

"Everyone in the White House except John Dean says the President had no idea what anybody was doing. If we believe this, it means that Ehrlichman and Haldeman were running the show. This is a frightening thought, much worse than having the President implicated in Watergate."

"But," I protested, "the President can't do everything himself. He has to have aides to carry out his orders."

"Dammit," said Cotswald, "if they carried out the President's orders, it means the President knew what was going on. If they did it on their own, that means I was a 'Democrat for Haldeman and Ehrlichman.' That's a terrible thing for any man to live with."

"But Haldeman and Ehrlichman may have been acting on their own just in regard to Watergate," I said. "The rest of the time they may have been acting on orders from the President."

"How do we know that? All the testimony indicates no one ever got in to see the President. We don't even know if the President was there half the time. The only thing Nixon read was Pat Buchanan's resume of the news every morning. Every White House staffer, Cabinet officer and Nixon appointee reported to Haldeman and Ehrlichman. When Haldeman and Ehrlichman gave orders they said they were speaking for the President. But all the proof so far is that they did anything they darned well pleased."

I was getting a little exasperated. "Well, what is your solution to the problem?"

"I think in the next election we should have a right to vote for the President's aides, as well as for the President. If the country's going to be handed over to Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Charles Colson and John Dean III, the American people should know about it in advance."

"That makes sense," I admitted.

"And I believe they should be sworn in at the same time as the President. If the President swears to uphold the Constitution, his people should swear to it too. Then if they screw up we can impeach them in a package deal."