

tion, the original Justice Department investigation and prosecution of the Watergate wiretappers had been lax and limited. No serious attempt had been made to find out who had ordered the wiretappers to break into and bug the Democratic National Headquarters last June, who had paid them, or who had approved the whole operation. Kleindienst offered his resignation voluntarily, but he was dismayed when Nixon insisted that his departure be announced at the same time as those of Ehrlichman, Haldeman and John Dean.

Dean, handsome and a smooth operator, had risen to his high-level post with virtually no experience as a practicing attorney, but with frequent demonstrations of loyalty to Nixon. But when his name became deeply involved with Watergate, he started scurrying for self-protection. He went to Justice Department prosecutors and told about the meetings he had attended at which the Watergate wiretapping plans were discussed. He revealed that former Attorney General John Mitchell had attended the meetings. Dean has asked for immunity against prosecution from the Justice Department in return for telling all he knows. So far, it has not been granted. He now could be making his sensational charges in an attempt to convince prosecutors that the knowledge he has would be worth their giving him the immunity.

The Speech. On Monday, Ziegler announced the stunning staff changes in Washington. Nixon remained at Camp David to craft his TV speech with Writer Price. He arrived at his Oval Office just 90 seconds before air time, looking and sounding nervous. A bust of Abraham Lincoln and a photo of Nixon's family had been placed within camera range. The occasion was reminiscent of Nixon's celebrated Checkers speech of 1952, in which he admitted that he had drawn on a secret \$18,000 campaign fund (an almost touchingly modest figure by current measurement) that had been donated by California political supporters, but denied using it for any personal, nonpolitical purpose.

The Watergate speech was disconcertingly ambivalent. Nixon resorted to an odd and habitual rhetorical device, explaining—as he often has done in his past speeches on Viet Nam—that he was rejecting “the easiest course” and pursuing the more difficult one. In this case, “the easiest course would be for me to blame those to whom I delegated the responsibility to run the campaign.” Placing the entire blame on subordinates, however, would not have been the easier course—because it would not have washed. To avoid accepting responsibility for the actions of so many men acting in his name would have been impossible.

Nevertheless, Nixon proceeded, in effect, to blame others by distancing himself from their activities. He had been preoccupied during the 1972 campaign, he said, with his “goal of bring-

THE PRESIDENCY/HUGH SIDNEY

Guilty Until Proven Innocent?

AT lunch a former Nixon Cabinet officer glumly wondered whether the President could survive the Watergate scandal. In that way he tacitly signaled his own doubts that Richard Nixon was innocent.

At breakfast in another part of Washington still another former Cabinet officer showed the same doubts. If evidence surfaced linking the President to the bugging or the cover-up, he said, he did not want to hear about it or think about it.

All last week Republican and Democratic Senators talked the same way in their private moments. Even some members of the federal judiciary confessed to old friends that although they did not want to believe that the President was implicated their years of experience in the great legal struggles of this nation left them, at this time at least, with the sad sense that Nixon had played a key role in the tragic drama.

If George Gallup's figures are correct—that half the people of the U.S. do not believe the President's protestations of innocence—the percentage of disbelievers in the federal city must run to 80% or 90%. All of this and more, most of it bubbling beneath the surface, point up Richard Nixon's staggering problem of restoring his credibility. While the law states that a man is innocent until proved guilty, the perverse ways of human nature and the singular circumstances of Watergate have reversed this fundamental rule. Nixon now stands guilty in many minds until he proves himself innocent.

This city has remained Democratic despite Nixon's efforts to make it bipartisan, so its feelings tend to be exaggerated. The fraternity of ex-White House aides believes that it would be impossible for a President to remain as ignorant of events as the White House indicates. “You don't lie to a President,” said one former White House aide. “I can't imagine any man working with the President who would keep such facts from him,” said another.

“I never entered the Oval Office without being awed,” insisted one veteran of two Administrations. “You can't lie in that atmosphere. Too much is at stake.”

It is this repeal of human nature that baffles even the Republicans who still stand with Nixon. The “I run my own campaign” declaration and the “supercrat” image, which have been so assiduously fostered by the Nixon people for years now, are declared “inoperative.” All this defies conventional logic—and that is the President's problem.

There are, nonetheless, a few people who claim that is precisely the case, that Nixon, as no other President in history, lived aloof while his men did the dirty work. We knew that Nixon was isolated, but we did not know how much. While we proclaimed the power of John N. Mitchell and H.R. Haldeman, we fell far short of reality. Perhaps Nixon was subjected to a form of presidential management that the outside world never knew and was never allowed to see. Perhaps these singularly antisocial men imposed their own withdrawal syndrome on the Oval Office, letting Nixon sink excessively into the lonely quiet that he relishes and believes he needs in order to husband his energy. Richard J. Whalen, once a Nixon campaign speechwriter and thinker, quit in disgust before Nixon entered the White House over just that issue—the specter of a President being in a “soundproof, shockproof bubble.” Back in 1972 Whalen wrote: “No potential danger is more ominous in a free society than the secret leaching away of presidential authority from the man the people chose to the men he chooses. To whom are they responsible? To him and their own consciences, of course, which is the essence of the danger when a President is protected even from the knowledge of what is said and done in his name.”

Not many are buying Whalen's observations yet. But if they are true and that is the explanation for this bizarre episode, then what a terrible tragedy it is for Nixon and the nation that those men were allowed to hide in their offices and keep their special operation such a secret. Had we known more, Nixon might not stand so suspect today. Better yet, giving the President the benefit of every doubt, had there been less White House secrecy, Watergate might never have been conceived.

NIXON IN THE OVAL OFFICE WITH (FROM LEFT) HALDEMAN, CHAPIN & EHRLICHMAN

