

What the President Had to Say Before

IN the months between the time that the Watergate burglary was first revealed in the press (June 17) and the time when Nixon announced (April 17) that he had learned of new "serious charges," it was mostly presidential surrogates who issued the denials of White House involvement. The President himself said remarkably little about the affair. Here are his principal statements:

▶ On June 22, five days after the Watergate break-in, Nixon said at a news conference that such an act "has no place whatever in our electoral process, or in our governmental process," and added that "the White House has had no involvement whatever in this particular incident."

▶ On Aug. 29, at a press conference Nixon "categorically" denied that anyone on the White House staff or at that time employed anywhere in his Administration was involved in what he called "this very bizarre incident." He blamed the break-in on "overzealous people" and promised that there would be no attempt to cover up the facts, saying, "We want the air cleared. We want it cleared as soon as possible."

▶ On Oct. 5, Nixon denied that he knew anything about the break-in and told the press that he was pleased with the FBI's investigation. "I wanted every lead carried out to the end because I wanted to be sure that no member of the White House staff and no man or woman in a position of major respon-

sibility in the Committee for Re-election had anything to do with this kind of reprehensible activity."

▶ On March 2, Nixon said that Executive privilege would apply to John W. Dean III, and that he would not permit his counsel to testify before the Senate select committee investigating Watergate. Said Nixon: "No President could ever agree to allow the counsel to the President to go down and testify before a committee."

▶ On April 17, Nixon reversed field. He told reporters that he had begun "intensive new inquiries" into the Watergate affair, as a result of "serious charges which came to my attention." He said no one in the Administration should be given "immunity from prosecution," adding: "I condemn any attempts to cover up this case, no matter who is involved."

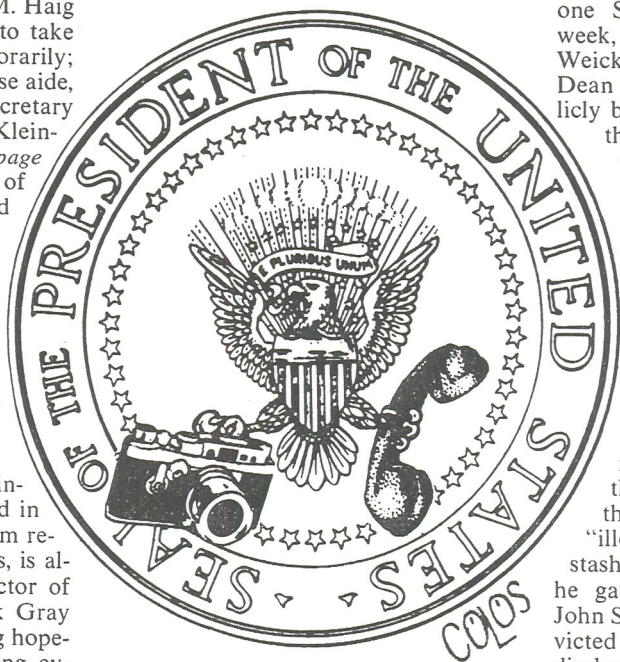
cow's reasoning undoubtedly was that it had too heavy an investment in friendly relations with Nixon, in view of upcoming East-West state visits, to risk smirching his image.

Nixon moved quickly to fill some of the gaping holes created in his staff. He named General Alexander M. Haig Jr., Army Vice Chief of Staff, to take over Haldeman's duties temporarily; Leonard Garment, a White House aide, to replace Dean; and Defense Secretary Elliot Richardson to succeed Kleindienst as Attorney General (*see page 30*). Former Deputy Secretary of Defense David Packard was, said Ziegler, the most likely choice to fill Richardson's spot as Defense Secretary. By week's end no one had yet been assigned the full range of Ehrlichman's chores, but Kenneth R. Cole Jr., another J. Walter Thompson product and a top Ehrlichman assistant since 1969, will take on added duties.

The sensibilities in the Administration have become so bruised in the infighting that another interim replacement, William Ruckelshaus, is already in trouble as acting director of the FBI. He replaced L. Patrick Gray III, who had resigned after being hopelessly compromised by destroying evidence and cooperating with the White House to protect high officials in the Watergate scandal. Although no one assailed Ruckelshaus personally, the tough former head of the Environmental Protection Agency became the target of a revolt within the FBI against any more political appointments. All but one of the FBI's 59 field-office heads joined in a telegram to the President demanding that "qualified executives within the FBI" be considered for the top spot. Ruckelshaus, who does not want the permanent directorship, tried to calm the top FBI officials in a 20-minute meeting. But after he left, they met

for two hours and still insisted that someone whom the White House could not control be named to head the bureau.

On the sound theory that the Administration simply cannot be trusted to investigate itself, no matter how in-



dependent Attorney General Richardson may prove to be, a bipartisan clamor arose for him to name an outside prosecutor in the Watergate case. Nixon said Richardson was free to do so, and the Attorney General-designate indicated that he will.

The stage is thus finally set for a full and hard-hitting inquiry in which any protection of the men around Nixon—or of the President himself—will be most unlikely. The federal grand jury in Washington, which has been looking into the Watergate case since last summer, will continue to take testimony from all the suspects and from other

witnesses. Senator Sam Ervin's Select Committee on Campaign Practices expects to begin televised hearings next week on Watergate and Republican campaign-disruption tactics.

The most potentially explosive witness, Counsel Dean, talked privately to one Senate committee member last week, Connecticut Republican Lowell Weicker. Some lawyers suspect that Dean hopes to air his testimony publicly before the committee, then plead that the widespread publicity would make it impossible to find an unbiased jury for any trial on criminal charges. Others too might try this tactic, or seek immunity from the grand jury, creating something of a marketplace for officials trying to avoid jail.

Dean, who remarked to associates that he feared for his life, took away from his office nine documents that he says are marked secret and shed light on the Watergate hearing. He said that he removed them to prevent "illegitimate destruction" and then stashed them in a bank deposit vault; he gave the keys to Federal Judge John Sirica, whose pressure on the convicted wiretappers helped release new disclosures.

How could such pervasive corruption of ethics start in an Administration of such seemingly square-shooting disciples of law and order? Some of Nixon's critics contend that he set the general pattern in the earliest stages of his political career, when he used some questionable tactics. More important, the closeness of Nixon's first two presidential campaigns, against John Kennedy in 1960 and Hubert Humphrey in 1968, bred an almost paranoid insecurity among Nixon's campaign workers. The slim win over Humphrey was a special shock.

Once he gained the presidency, Nix-