



Colson's Influence Grows

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ON SATURDAY, Aug. 26, White House political aide Charles Colson telephoned the Committee to Re-elect President Nixon down the street on Pennsylvania Avenue, thereby escalating the backstage tactical and personal dispute within President Nixon's campaign.

Colson explained that Sen. Bob Dole, Republican national chairman, was issuing a statement—inspired by Colson—bludgeoning Sen. George McGovern for his “willingness to condone” the violent demonstrators at the Republican National Convention “by his silence.” Colson wanted Clark MacGregor, campaign director at the re-elect Nixon committee, to issue a similar statement.

Unenthusiastic, aides at the committee replied that MacGregor was on the road and they could issue no statement in his name.

WELL, SNAPPED Colson, the President himself personally wants this done. Suspicious, MacGregor's lieutenants called the office of White House major domo H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, who takes careful note of Richard M. Nixon's every desire. No, said a Haldeman deputy,

we've never heard the President say that.

In the end, MacGregor was contacted and, belatedly, issued a toned-down version of Dole's statement. But the incident brewed more bad blood between the re-election committee and Colson at the White House.

Apart from personal rivalries, at issue here are tactics to protect Mr. Nixon's immense lead. Trying to connect the stumbling, bedraggled McGovern with the wild toughs disrupting the Republican convention is, say Colson's rivals, precisely the overkill the President must guard against. But it is precisely the politics that irresistibly attracts both Chuck Colson and Dick Nixon.

INDEED, COLSON has grown so close to the President so quickly because he exudes qualities Mr. Nixon admires: toughness, quickness, intelligence—and a lust for personal combat. “Chuck says the things the President likes to hear,” a campaign aide told us.

The President's taste here is not shared by John Mitchell, who dislikes and distrusts Colson. As Mr. Nixon's campaign manager, Mitchell would have limited Colson's influence. But when Mitchell resigned and

was replaced by MacGregor (who lacks Mitchell's intimacy with the President), the way was open for Colson's domination of campaign tactics.

Moreover, Colson sits astride the counter-attack group (of re-elect committee and White House aides) which meets every morning at 9:15 to devise anti-McGovern tactics. The group is headed by Ed Failor, a veteran Republican operative and a strategist in MacGregor's 1970 Minnesota Senate campaign. Of the group's six permanent members listed by Failor July 29 in a secret memorandum, three are Colson's deputies. Furthermore, Colson himself often attends to listen and talk.

Such collaboration, however, has only reinforced the re-elect committee staff's suspicion toward Colson—particularly since Mitchell's Aug. 13 statement attacking Ramsey Clark's adventures in Hanoi.

CONTRARY TO OUR previous report, that Mitchell acted on his own, the idea was hatched in the White House. Under Colson's supervision, the White House prepared an anti-Clark statement for Mitchell and sent

it to the re-elect committee. MacGregor was absent, but his lieutenants approved it. Mitchell, despite misgivings, agreed.

But top Republicans, believing Clark's conduct sufficiently obnoxious without Republican embellishments, were upset (some assuming incorrectly that Mitchell fired from the hip without authorization). MacGregor didn't like it. Neither did Vice President Agnew. And neither did the President.

When Mr. Nixon complained, according to a report received at the re-elect committee, Colson told him this was the re-elect committee's idea. True or not, that report added personal animosity to the re-elect committee staff's worries of Colson overkill needlessly endangering the President's campaign.

Nevertheless, Colson is now the dominant tone-setter of that campaign. The only possible check against him is the all-powerful Haldeman, who now seems to totally approve of Colson. But that could change if McGovern starts catching up and Colson's brass-knuckle tactics are blamed. His enemies down the avenue at the re-elect committee will do their best to see to that.