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Nixon's Loyalty Freak

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THE PRESIDENT'S decision to "shake up" the administration has made it open season for malicious gossip. With one conspicuous exception, to which I shall return, hardly any important figure in the government has escaped censure.

Henry Kissinger, the President's chief adviser on foreign policy, is accused of conducting the most important international business on a private basis. Bob Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, is charged with complicity in the Watergate affair.

Secretary of State William Rogers is said to know little and do less. The word about Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird and his deputy, Kenneth Rush, is that they are unequal to the task of controlling the military.

George Shultz at the Treasury is supposed to be hooked on the ideology of the free market. Peter Peterson at Commerce and Elliot Richardson at HEW are said to be interested only in advancing themselves to the top spot of the State Department.

Attorney General Richard Kleindienst is written off as too impatient even to read basic documents. John Volpe at Transportation, Rogers Morton at Interior, George Romney at HUD and Earl Butz at Agriculture are dismissed as secondary figures.

AMID THIS torrent of acid, however, barely a drop has been spilled on John Ehrlichman. But Ehrlichman happens to be the President's closest adviser on domestic affairs. For many reasons he is perhaps the most important single person involved in the shakeup.

Ehrlichman is a central figure because he sits athwart the line of communications with the President on all matters of internal policy. Propositions on taxes, the cities, minorities, drugs, the police, the environment all go through him.

In many ways Ehrlichman is ideally fitted for these responsibilities. He is a strong, confident person and he enjoys a close working relation with the President. People who have seen them together report that he is one of the

few White House aides who is never sycophantic.

He has the intellectual penetration, and the attention span, necessary to understand complicated matters that have to be presented in highly abstract terms. Equally strong are his powers of articulation. Unlike most persons in government, he is straightforward, even blunt.

He also has a generous supply of the energy required for any high post in government. He works long and hard to master his subjects. Moreover, he learns from experience. "That makes a mockery of ad hockery," he once said after a quick move he made had turned out badly.

THESE VIRTUES naturally carry with them some corresponding defects. Ehrlichman has a good relation with the President because he has spent his whole political life working with Mr. Nixon. As a result, he tends to be a kind of loyalty freak.

He seems to act on the belief that the chief job of everybody in town is to work for the greater glory of Mr. Nixon. He apparently does not comprehend that others might feel—for sound professional or ethical reasons—different responsibilities.

Thus he has publicly disparaged cabinet officers for being sympathetic to the departments they head. He has not engaged the cabinet in the Domestic Council which is supposed to put together the administration's internal program.

His relations with the Congress suffer from the same difficulty. High-minded senators report that he treats humanitarian proposals as though they were cynical, self-serving, pork-barrel operations.

Similarly with the press. Few newspapermen were more critical of George McGovern's welfare and tax proposals than Hobart Rowen of The Washington Post. But when Rowen called into question some of Ehrlichman's comments on taxes, Ehrlichman thought it germane to write that Rowen's son had

married McGovern's daughter.

All of this makes Ehrlichman a central figure for assessing the reorganization of the administration. If he stays where he is, then the reform proposals of the second term will predictably run against the same unsympathetic public, the same sour Congress and the same internally divided administration which buried the reform proposals of the first term. If the President truly intends to move forward with governmental innovation, then he will need as his chief internal policy adviser a broader person—a kind of domestic Kissinger.

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