

Operative Ehrlichman

Part 4/3/73

John D. Ehrlichman, one of the most powerful men in America until his resignation from the White House staff April 30, began his political career in 1960 as a political espionage agent for Richard M. Nixon, spying on Gov. Nelson Rockefeller of New York and the Democratic National Convention.

As an unknown 35-year-old zoning lawyer from Seattle, Ehrlichman was officially listed as Nixon advance man in 1960 working under his close friend and former UCLA classmate, chief advance man H. R. (Bob) Haldeman. In fact, he was an undercover agent stalking Rockefeller's abortive campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. Later he was assigned as a secret observer to the 1960 Democratic convention in Los Angeles that nominated John F. Kennedy.

Thus, whether or not the courts finally tie him directly to the Watergate scandal, Ehrlichman's meager political background was in the little-known clandestine side of campaigning. Indeed, as recently as August 1968, when Ehrlichman turned up at the Republican National Convention as a high Nixon aide, fellow staffers thought of him mostly as a "security" man.

Ehrlichman made no secret of his political beginnings in a May 1970 interview with William W. Prochnow, then Washington correspondent for the Seattle Times (now an aide to Democratic Sen. Warren Magnuson of Washington). Because of his anonymity, Ehrlichman said, he was assigned to "operative work" stalking Rockefeller.

For example, Ehrlichman told of driving a Rockefeller car in the governor's campaign procession in North Dakota—apparently his June 3-4, 1960, swing through Fargo and several other towns. "The Rockefeller people thought I was from North Dakota, and the North Dakota people thought I was from Rockefeller," Ehrlichman told Prochnow. He enjoyed repeating the same story to friends in Seattle.

Ehrlichman described his undercover duties at the Los Angeles Democratic convention as twofold: (1) to examine attitudes of the southern delegates; (2) to prepare a dossier on the Kennedy campaign apparatus.

Behind the long Senate Foreign Relations Committee delay in confirming four top-rank diplomats is a strange consensus by the strongly liberal-oriented committee to force President Nixon to send "new faces" to carry out U.S. policy in the Far East.

Chairman J. W. Fulbright of Arkansas is leading this pressure move against the administration, but he has allies in both parties who presently comprise a clear majority of the committee.

Thus, the nominations—sent to the committee between March 19 and May 8—may be held up for several weeks during closed-door bargaining with Secretary of State William P. Rogers. These continued vacancies, high officials believe, could damage U.S. Far Eastern policy.

The delayed appointments are: G. McMurtrie Godley, assistant secretary

for Far Eastern affairs; Graham Martin, ambassador to South Vietnam; William Sullivan, ambassador to the Philippines; and Charles S. Whitehouse, ambassador to Laos. All named key diplomatic posts in the Far East over the last decade.

With the Vietnam war officially ended, senators engaged in the big stall claim "new faces" should be sent to the Far East to carry out a "new policy." But it is hardly conceivable that the administration would back down on its nominees, each of whom is highly respected in the Senate. Despite Mr. Nixon's present weakness, the most the pressure move can conceivably accomplish is to change the pattern of future ambassadorial assignments.

The intense White House hostility toward fired presidential counsel John W. Dean III deepened last week with new restrictions on the use of his old documents.

Until now, Dean had been permitted to duplicate documents from his files, stored in the basement of the Executive Office Building next door to the White House. The procedure: A secretary, under the watchful eye of an FBI agent, would remove documents selected by Dean and duplicate them for Dean's use.

But last Wednesday the White House instructed Dean that henceforth he could personally examine but not copy or remove his old files.