

Watergate Threatens The Presidency Itself

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Washington — The concern here grew last week from saving the Nixon Administration to "salvaging the Presidency."

A worry held by many sensitive politicians, including some within the high ranks of the Administration and the Republican Party, was that it will take years to restore public confidence in the highest office in the land.

That institution has been struck by what many consider the worst scandal in presidential history, and Richard Nixon seemed unwilling or unable to act in the face of constantly emerging revelations of malfeasance in high places.

The President moved only when he was forced to, and then tentatively. It was emphasized at the White House that William D. Ruckelshaus will be only an "interim" acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, possibly for no more than two months.

Ruckelshaus's appointment is not likely to satisfy those who criticized his predecessor as too political. For Ruckelshaus, like L. Patrick Gray, campaigned for Mr. Nixon last fall and used the prestige of

his office to advance Republican fortunes.

The revelation that Gray had destroyed secret documents at the behest of White House aides John D. Ehrlichman and John W. Dean 3d simply added to the gloomy picture of the authority and functions of government, including the Justice Department and FBI, being used to cover up widespread political wiretapping, espionage and sabotage.

Biggest Scandal

Watergate, in its immensity and breadth of involvement, dwarfed previous White House venalities. Like any institution of power and wealth, the staff of the presidency has attracted people whose principles easily yielded to the temptations of a quick and unethical dollar in exchange for favors granted.

Rare indeed has there been an Administration without some scandal. But not before has the charge of corruption so deeply involved the integrity of the electoral process, the circle of men intimately involved in helping the President maintain his office, and the honesty of the chief law enforcers in the federal establishment.

His government in disarray, seemingly betrayed by mem-
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bers of his own staff, buffeted by his fellow Republicans as no President has in recent history, the underpinnings of his dignity and authority corroded, Richard Nixon continued to wrap himself ever more tightly in secrecy and isolation.

Friday night he went alone to his Camp David retreat, leaving his aides behind, giving the impression that he would spend the weekend in solitary and serious thought about the Watergate affair.

It appeared that Mr. Nixon was trying to "ride it out," to gamble that he can remain untouched personally, that the blame can fall on others easily dismissed and forgotten.

Pressure to Explain

One version that circulated here yesterday was that Mr. Nixon will emerge from his self-imposed silence before midweek, possibly Tuesday night. It is now expected that indictments of some of his present and former aides will have been processed.

White House aides acknowledged that pressure continued to build on the President to provide some explanation to the American people on where things had gone wrong, on his own involvement or lack of it, and most important, on how it can be cleaned up and the business of running the country resumed.

The darkness of the Republican Party's political landscape prompted one senior party official to speculate that Watergate would shadow the GOP for years, just as the Depression did.

Republican National Chairman George Bush told National Committee employees that no one connected in any

way with Watergate will work in future GOP campaigns.

Effect on 1974

Meanwhile, Republicans talked pessimistically about the 1974 midterm election, and the Democrats breathed a little easier. The one thing Mr. Nixon still had going for him, however, was the tendency of Democrats to hold back their criticism. They left that to the Republicans, who, from the White House point of view, only added to the fire.

White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler said Mr. Nixon himself was applying pressure on investigators and some members of his staff to get "to the bottom" of this.

Vice President Spiro T. Agnew took a step away from the White House. While announcing his "full confidence" in Mr. Nixon's integrity, he said he would resign if his conscience required it.

Unclear Points

Mr. Nixon's precise role in the investigation is not known. Has he, for example, continued his practice of meeting chief of staff H. R. Haldeman and Ehrlichman several times a day to discuss pending Administration business? Or were they, like Dean, shuffling papers and waiting for the grand jury to act?

Perhaps, through it all, Mr. Nixon was taking his own ad-

vice, as it was offered in the 1968 introduction to his book, *Six Crises*:

"Some crisis is unavoidable, and proves a test for leadership; some crisis is healthy, when it snaps us out of our lethargy; but crisis cannot be allowed to become the American way of life.

"A national crisis is a shock to the body politic. Too many shocks, especially long-sustained shocks, drain a nation of its energy. It can cause a national punchiness, and even worse, cause a rebellion against creative change and progress.

"There are more than enough 'natural shocks that flesh is heir to'—crises that cannot be avoided—for us to add to them by lack of foresight or a willingness to act in time.

"This may disappoint those who are attracted by the excitement of high drama, but the best way to meet a crisis is to anticipate it and avoid it.

"Those who ignore impending crisis are condemned to live through it."

On the face of it, Mr. Nixon has chosen to live through the crisis of Watergate.