

Nixon Called 'Anguished' By Verdict

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By Lawrence Meyer
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Richard M. Nixon is "deeply anguished" by the Watergate cover-up conviction of four former members of his administration, but he will not comment because they are appealing the verdict, an aide to Nixon said yesterday.

Nixon, whose testimony was sought by former top presidential adviser John D. Ehrlichman as indispensable to his defense, was secluded in San Clemente, recovering from the phlebitis that prevented his appearance at the trial.

"President Nixon is deeply anguished by Watergate and that these men who were among his closest aides and their families have suffered so much and that their lives have been so tragically touched by Watergate," the aide said.

Although testimony and White House tapes played at the trial implicated Nixon in the cover-up along with the four men convicted—Ehrlichman, former White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian—Nixon is immune from prosecution under the full pardon granted him last September by President Ford.

Mr. Ford, leaving Vail, Colo., for Washington after a holiday skiing vacation, declined to comment yesterday on the jury's verdict Wednesday. "I don't think it's appropriate for me to comment," he told reporters.

James F. Neal, the chief prosecutor in the trial, said in an interview with The Nashville Banner yesterday that he thought President Ford's pardon of Nixon was "correct, all things considered."

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Noting that he had not spoken publicly on the matter before, Neal added, however, "I thought President Ford's timing was bad. I was shocked and concerned about the timing of the pardon announcement, but I thought his action was correct."

Neal, who has announced his resignation to return to his Nashville law practice, said the Nixon pardon "sounds like a lack of equal justice. But many things sound like a lack of equal justice. You prosecute some people and you don't prosecute others for a multitude of reasons. It must be this way."

In Morganton, N.C., former Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), chairman of the Senate Watergate committee, said the jury's verdict "showed that the jury as well as the courts stand for the administration of justice regardless of the power or station of the men involved." Ervin said he doubted that President Ford would pardon the four convicted men because of the adverse public reaction to the pardon of Nixon.

Mardian, who appeared shocked and angered by his conviction on a single conspiracy count, was described yesterday by his lawyer, David Bress, as being "so shocked by the verdict that I don't think he's emotionally able to talk about it."

Ehrlichman, who appeared on the NBC "Today" program (WRC), said that if he had

known that Nixon was taping their conversations he "would have acted differently." Instead of listening to Nixon, Ehrlichman said, he would have told him, "Well, the moral imperative here, Mr. President, requires that you do this and not this."

Ehrlichman also derided the prosecution's assertion that he was part of an orchestrated conspiracy. "Actually," Ehrlichman said, "if you look at these five defendants, from my standpoint, one of them I'd

never met before—Ken Parkinson [Kenneth W. Parkinson, who was acquitted of all charges]—another one I hadn't seen for a couple of years—Bob Mardian—another one I saw perhaps four times over the span of the year that was in issue in the case—John Mitchell—and then on only a very casual basis. So if that was an orchestra, it never got together for a rehearsal."

Although some of the defendants and their lawyers indicated that several reversible errors had been committed by U.S. District Court Judge John J. Sirica during the trial, one lawyer said privately that with the exception of not having Nixon appear as a witness and allowing extensive testimony on the Ellsberg break-in, "there wasn't two cents' worth of errors in the trial."