

Two Cheers For Mr. Nixon

By James Reston

WASHINGTON, May 1—There is more, much more, to be uncovered in the current Washington scandal, but much has been accomplished in the last few days, and this may be a good time to pause and recognize what has been done.

President Nixon has made substantial progress. He rejected the course of defiance and sentimentality. He was urged by some to "tough it out," even to portray the Republican conspiracy as a defense against a dangerous plot by militants of the left, and to stick by his two principal assistants, H. R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman. But he accepted responsibility, though not blame, for the mess, and let Haldeman and Ehrlichman go.

Meanwhile, he replaced Richard Kleindienst with Elliot Richardson at the Justice Department, Patrick Gray with William Ruckelshaus at the F.B.I., and John Dean with Len Garment in the White House. And John Mitchell, Maurice Stans, Jeb Stuart Magruder, Charles Colson, among others, are no longer in positions of power.

The President's speech was full of self-pity and unconvincing alibis, but as usual it is wiser to pay attention to what he does rather than what he says, and he has done enough to make a new beginning and turn the cover-up into an objective investigation.

Time and again in his speech the President talked about getting "to the bottom of the matter," about doing everything in his power to assure that "such abuses are purged from our political processes," and about getting "a new set of standards, new rules and procedures to ensure that future elections will be as nearly free of such abuses as they can possibly be made." This, he said, "is my goal."

Well, if there is to be "no whitewash at the White House" and the President is determined "that the truth shall be fully known," he can begin on the task by disclosing where the Republicans got all that money before last April 7, for money is really "at the bottom of the matter."

The restoration of public confidence in the integrity of the White House and the political process begins precisely with following general Presidential sentiments by specific Presidential acts that match the rhetoric; and the disclosure of the campaign booty of 1972 and the presentation of new fair laws to finance future campaigns is about as good a place to begin as any.

This town is full of gloomy conclusions that the President and his Administration have been crippled in the short run and irreparably damaged in the long run by these scandals, and while this may be true, it is not inevi-

WASHINGTON

table if the President's future acts measure up to his words.

Already, there are signs of a new attitude in the White House. The President has not only cleaned out the top of the White House administrative and domestic staff, but has given Mr. Richardson the right to appoint a special supervising prosecutor from outside the Administration to carry on the investigation.

Also, immediately after his speech, he had the Congressional leaders in for a talk and called his Cabinet into session. Meanwhile, Ronald Ziegler, the White House spokesman, actually apologized to *The Washington Post* for his contemptuous remarks about that paper's reporting on the Watergate, and the President himself visited the White House press room as a gesture of reconciliation.

These are small things, but they are important. At the heart of this long tragedy has been an assumption on the part of the President and his principal aides that those who dissented from his policies were not only wrong but malicious, and if he is now going to try a different course, the chances are he will get a fair response from both the Congress and the press.

There will be a period of disruption for a while. The centralized and isolated White House staff will have to be replaced by new men or a new reliance on the departments and agencies. New chiefs will be at H.E.W., Defense and Justice, and while it will take time to break them in, the much-maligned bureaucracy will undoubtedly carry on through this crisis as before.

In the long run, the danger is that a vulnerable Administration will try to con the opposition again and encourage excessive partisan conflict, resulting in a stalemate between the executive and the legislature. But in truth there is more sadness in both parties about this tragedy than partisan vindictiveness.

This is not to say that the political espionage and sabotage will not and should not be a party issue in the coming elections. The chances are that it will take months and maybe even years before all the investigations, trials and appeals are over.

So Mr. Nixon cannot now turn away from it and, as he said in his speech, turn his full attention "to the larger duties of this office," for there is no larger duty than restoring public confidence in his Administration.

Nevertheless the work of the nation has to go on while the new investigations proceed, and this is still possible if the President follows up on his promises.