

The New Nixon Staff

By James Reston

President Nixon's new White House staff answers some of the questions on the public mind but not by any means all the questions. He has changed the men, but has he changed the system? Has he installed at the center of power a truth squad or a rescue squad?

These are hard and maybe unfair questions, the answers to which nobody will know for a while; but the problem now, as everybody knows, is to restore public confidence in a Battered Administration, and while this cannot be done until all the evidence is in on the Watergate scandals, the President's reaction to the wreckage doesn't remove the public doubts.

Some of his moves have been reassuring. He didn't want to let Messrs. Haldeman and Ehrlichman go but he did. He didn't want to revise his concept of executive privilege or have an independent prosecutor with access to the facts and the power of granting immunity to witnesses, but he agreed under pressure.

All this is to the good. He is moving again and asserting his authority, and it is a fair assumption that General Haig, Mel Laird and John Connally, all of whom moved into the White House against their personal desires and interests, didn't do so in order to perpetuate the Nixon-Haldeman-Ehrlichman Politburo system that led to the present crisis. So even the "system" is changing.

General Haig will give him personal loyalty and administrative skill. Messrs. Laird and Connally, who have their own ambitions and constituencies, will provide the independent political professionalism that the young amateurs and hucksters in the old team lacked. And Len Garment, replacing John Dean as the White House counsel, is a sensitive and competent lawyer. Mr. Garment was in charge of the 200th

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anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in the White House, and now he has the influence, as well as the desire, to help the President restore the unity of the Republic by July 4, 1976.

Still, something holds President Nixon back from making the simple but dramatic moves that would support his claims that he wants to get to the bottom of this tragedy, expose

all the facts as quickly as possible, so that the country can get beyond this nightmare and concentrate on the great questions of public policy at home and abroad.

There are times in the career of a President or the history of a nation when the only refuge is the truth—all of it, no matter how embarrassing to the past, so that the country can get on to the future. But something makes Mr. Nixon reject the notion of a bipartisan staff and Cabinet and turn to insiders like Haig, Connally and Laird, something that tells him not to come forward all the way with his own story and answer the anxious questions on the public mind.

For example, he is worried now, and no wonder, about the Senate Watergate hearings going on for weeks, and even months, every television witness adding another drop of doubt and poison about the men who worked for his reelection.

The Watergate Senators are being asked to suspend the hearings, or at least to get all the principal witnesses on camera, to clear the President's name, so that the President can go on with his "larger duties" of governing the country, removing the doubts of the people, and giving Archibald Cox, the Watergate prosecutor, a chance to study the facts and put in jail the people who broke the law.

But if the President wants to get to the bottom of all this, as he says, cut across all this interminable testimony in the Senate hearings, he doesn't have to wait for the testimony of Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean and all the rest, or stand on his constitutional rights to defy subpoenas from the courts or the Ervin committee.

Even in this awkward political and legal situation, the President has the power to speak. There is nothing that prevents him from saying that he wants, voluntarily, to give a deposition to the prosecutors or the Senate Watergate committee, on his knowledge or ignorance of the whole affair.

Mr. Nixon still has more power than anybody else. Assuming his innocence, he had the authority to bring into the White House staff and the Cabinet, new men who would be seen by the country to be objective, and who would be the basis of a new bipartisan "national government." This he rejected.

Also, he had the power to deal with all the questions of his involvement in the scandals by offering to give a deposition to the investigators from the courts and the Senate, but he has not done that either.

So while he has made progress, the crisis of confidence remains. He has changed the staff, and he may even have changed the "system"; but he has still left the doubt about whether he has installed in the White House a truth squad or a rescue squad. He is still holding back, manipulating rather than facing the doubts of the nation; and the result is that despite the progress he has made in the last few days, he is still in terrible trouble.