

A Joyless Reunion

The Once-Mighty Face Judgment

By Laurence Stern
Washington Post Staff Writer

It was like a class reunion on the eve of Judgment Day.

They came to the courtroom of Judge John J. Sirica, these hard-nosed and once-mighty men of the Nixon White House, with stage smiles of assurance, casual banter and a phalanx of criminal lawyers who are trying to keep them out of jail.

They delivered their pleas of "not guilty" in firm, lawyerly voice not yet accustomed to troubles' muted tonalities.

"Hi, Bob," said former Attorney General John N. Mitchell as former White House Chief of Staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman joined him at the defendants' table. The tone seemed more appropriate to the Oval Office than a criminal courtroom.

In the minutes before the arraignment, the second Watergate Seven (the first seven were convicted of the actual break-in) engaged in a heavy round of hand-shaking and bluff chatter, in the manner of men who hadn't seen each other for some time.

At the prosecution table, just a few feet away, Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski and his staff of young lawyers sat impassively, waiting for Judge Sirica to begin the proceedings. At one point Jill Wine Volner, the No. 2 Watergate cover-up prosecutor, stood up and silently surveyed the distinguished array of defendants.

The business at hand—the arraignments in Criminal Case 74-10—took only 4 minutes and 55 seconds (by one journalist's stop-watch reading) to transact. The defendants and their attorneys clustered before Judge Si-

See SCENE, A14, Col. 3

SCENE, From A1

rica. As each name was read, each of the principals uttered his plea of not guilty.

So the trail wended yesterday for three men who once stood highest in the confidence and service of President Richard M. Nixon after 20 months of unrelenting press disclosures, grand jury testimony and senatorial hearings—Mitchell, Haldeman and Ehrlichman.

Now the one bond they and their four colleagues have is that they face criminal prosecution in the Watergate cover-up for their services to a common employer, the President of the United States.

Mr. Nixon is also engaged with his own Watergate defense, but from the sanctuary of the White House, armored with attorneys paid out of public funds. One of the most intriguing questions in the prospective trials of the former Nixon aides is to what degree their defense will conform or clash with the President's case for his own innocence.

There is little evidence that is being sought by the Watergate grand juries that lies beyond the personal knowledge of the seven men arraigned yesterday.

Of the seven, the toll of Watergate seemed to weigh

most heavily on Mitchell, who sagged in his chair at times. His face was gray and drawn.

Colson, too, between smiles and handshakes wore an expression of haunted preoccupation.

Outside the courthouse a crowd of some 200 gathered to gawk, boo or protest. Some frustrated spectators began to queue up outside the door as early as 7:30 a.m. but were denied admission to the small courtroom because of the scarcity of seats.

Others carried signs "Law and Order," "Preventive Detention," "Nixon's Next" or engaged in minor acts of guerrilla street theater.

Robert Maslow, 30, wore a huge papier-mache bust of President Nixon and started to disrobe, but a policeman threw a raincoat over him and rushed him into a cruiser. Maslow drew a \$10 fine and a disorderly conduct charge for his act of political witness.

Cries of "Sieg Heil" and "Law and Order" greeted Mitchell as he strode into the courthouse shortly before 11 a.m.

When the courtroom proceeding was over Ehrlichman walked toward a group of reporters and glanced at

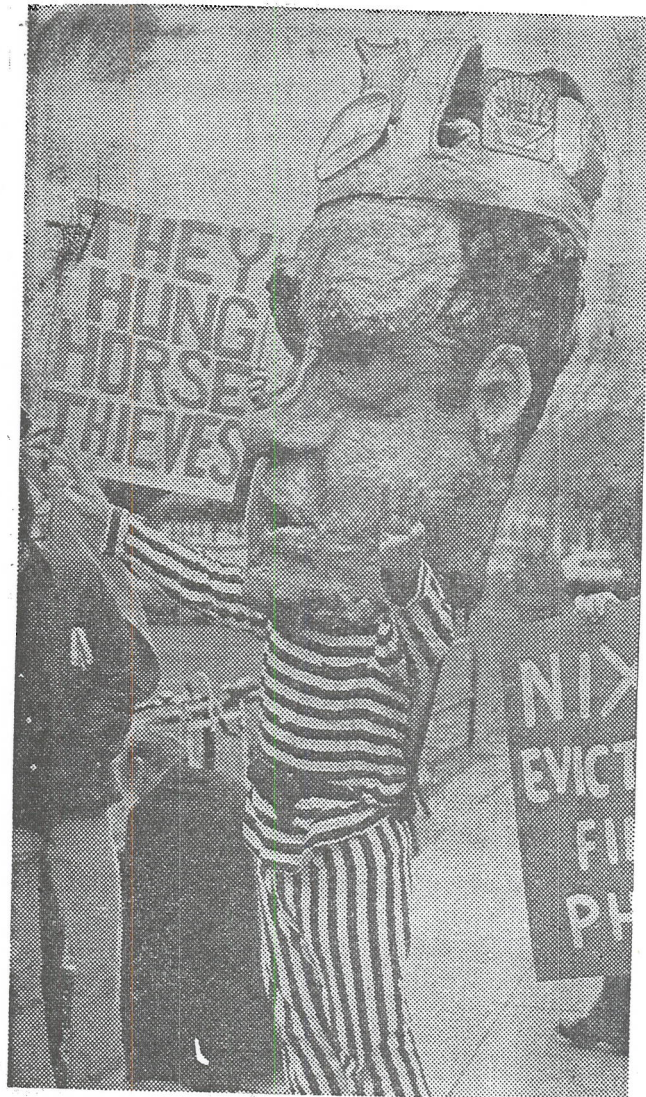
sketches of the defendants being drawn by a television network artist.

"That's terrible," he said with a smile in his old sweet-and-sour manner. "Is this the first time you've ever done this? Does anyone have anything better to show me?"

Haldeman followed Ehrlichman also with conspicuous show of imperturbability to the artist's sketch pad.

"Are you doing a good one?" he asked, glancing down at the drawing of himself. "You can do an accurate one—or a good one."

They were the last to leave the courtroom.



By Douglas Chevalier—The Washington Post

Demonstrators in front of courthouse where former Nixon administration officials were arraigned.