

Haldeman and Ehrlichman Reported Fighting Ouster

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WASHINGTON, April 27—H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman, the two high-ranking White House assistants who have been implicated in the Watergate case, are fighting hard to retain their jobs, informed sources said today. The sources, including friends of the two men and other Presidential aides, said that Mr. Haldeman's and Mr. Ehrlichman's attitude had delayed President Nixon's decision on what steps he should take next to combat the scandal.

Both Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman flew with the President to Meridian, Miss., today, for a speech. On the return flight to Washington, they met with Mr. Nixon aboard his plane, presumably to discuss the resignation of L. Patrick Gray 3d as acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Several of Mr. Nixon's closest advisers, both inside and outside the White House, have strongly urged him in recent days to conduct a thorough housecleaning of his staff, without waiting to see which of his aides, if any, will be indicted by the Watergate grand jury or ultimately convicted.

"A lot of us want him to let the chips fall where they may," said one White House official

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Haldeman and Ehrlichman Said To Be Fighting Ouster by Nixon

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who appears to have retained the President's confidence through all the disclosures of the last two weeks. "The problem is that some of the chips don't want to fall."

He indicated that he was referring to Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers is reported to have urged Mr. Nixon, during a cruise on the Potomac River last week aboard the Presidential yacht, Sequoia, to move quickly and decisively. George Bush, chairman of the Republican National Committee, sent similar word to Mr. Nixon yesterday.

But any housecleaning would almost certainly involve Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman, and both are arguing that Mr. Nixon should do nothing in their cases unless one or the other, or both, are indicted. Mr. Nixon is committed publicly to suspend aides if they are indicted.

As sketched by one intimate, the President has three basic choices: Clean house now; wait and see what the grand jury does, then decide; decide now to retain Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman no matter what the consequences, unless they are indicted.

Dole Urges Resignations

Mr. Haldeman, the President's chief of staff, is suspected of involvement in both the planning and subsequent covering-up of the break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters; Mr. Ehrlichman, the chief domestic adviser, has been implicated only in the cover-up.

If Mr. Nixon decided to retain the two men, he would leave himself open to accusations, as one Republican Senator said today, that "he still hasn't come completely clean."

A former party chairman,

Senator Robert Dole of Kansas, said publicly this afternoon what many Republican professionals and members of Congress have been saying privately.

In an interview with United Press International in Topeka, Kan., Mr. Dole called for the immediate resignation of Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman and said that "if they have any dedication and loyalty to the President, they can show it by resigning."

"Right now the credibility of the Administration is zilch, zero," he added.

In an apparent attempt to gauge the depth of such feeling, Nixon associates have discreetly begun to sound out opinion leaders, seeking their judgment as to probable public reaction to the retention of the two high-ranking officials.

One White House source said that the meetings of John J. Wilson, the two aides' lawyer, with the President and with the prosecutor in the Watergate case were part of an effort to find a way for Mr. Haldeman and Mr. Ehrlichman to avoid indictment if possible.

The sources dismissed a report, published this afternoon in The Washington Star-News, that Mr. Wilson had been asked by the President to provide "an independent assessment" of the two aides' involvement.

Mr. Wilson, as the attorney for the two, could hardly offer an independent point of view; in fact, according to American Bar Association officials, such an arrangement would constitute a prima facie conflict of interest under the Canon of Ethics.

It would be normal practice, however, for an attorney to talk to a prosecutor and to the man in over-all charge of the prosecution—in this case, the President—in an effort to determine what the best deal for his clients would be.