

Haldeman Says Nixon 'Didn't Know'

ACAPULCO, Mexico, April 3 (AP)—H. R. Haldeman says that President Nixon "didn't know a damned thing about Watergate" and "he didn't know about a cover-up of Watergate."

But Mr. Nixon's former White House chief of staff said yesterday that the American public presumed that both he and Mr. Nixon were guilty and "that ain't right."

Mr. Haldeman said that he was confident that when his case was tried he would be acquitted and "the truth will do it."

Mr. Haldeman discussed his more than four years as a top Nixon aide during a question-and-answer session with a group of young business executives from throughout North America.

His appearances this week before the Young Presidents' Organization ended virtually a year of seclusion since leaving the White House. While the sessions are officially off the record, a transcript of Mr. Haldeman's remarks was obtained by newsmen.

Court Order Heeded

Mr. Haldeman, who is under indictment on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, adhered strictly to Federal Judge John J. Sirica's order that he not discuss specific details of the case. But he asserted:

"I know perfectly well that I am considered guilty until I prove myself innocent, and that President Nixon is pre-

sumed guilty until he proves himself innocent. That's ain't right. But realistically, that's the case. That's what we have to deal with."

In his two-hour discussion, he disagreed with the premise that "the country is in a mess." He said the Nixon Administration had pulled the nation out of "what history will show are far greater messes," including the war in Vietnam.

He conceded that "something did go wrong" in the operation of the 1972 Committee for the Re-election of the President but said that even the extensive Watergate investigations had failed to pinpoint the problem.

"One of the great tragedies to me of Watergate is the setback to the enormous number of initiatives that were under way and were intended to be under way in the second term," he said.

On a personal note, Mr. Haldeman said he did not reflect on his White House years with any feeling of bitterness or vindictiveness and "I hope not with arrogance."

Mr. Haldeman said he accepted an invitation from friends early this year to participate in the meeting of the Young Presidents' Organization, which is made up of men who become presidents of companies before they are 40 years old.

Nixon Called Soft-Hearted

LOS ANGELES, April 3 (UPI)—Mr. Haldeman told the meeting that President Nixon's greatest weakness was that he was too soft hearted, unable

to discipline or dismiss people. The Los Angeles Times reported today.

Asked what was Mr. Nixon's greatest weakness, Mr. Haldeman, according to The Times, replied, "This is one you probably won't find credible, but I think his greatest weakness is his soft heartedness at the personal level."

"He's a very tough guy in the abstract. But it is very hard for him to deal with personal problems. He has a very soft heart at the person-to-person human relationship level. It is hard for him to fire people, to reprimand people. He'd call people in and chew them out, except for a few of us."

"His chewing out was sometimes indirect and delicate and sometimes that got in our way," Mr. Haldeman was quoted as saying.

Jury Problem Seen

Mr. Haldeman told the business men that the steady leak of information about Watergate and related investigations showed "a total breakdown of the grand jury system and the investigative process" safeguards on confidentiality.

Asked about the President "dragging his feet" on release of the White House tapes, Mr. Haldeman said "An awful lot of information and knowledge is being made public, that in my opinion—and I know in the President's opinion—should better not be made public, in the interest of the nation."

He said "the American people do not have the means by which to determine the entire truth in ample or adequate perspective."

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