

president

# A White House Brooming

ON APRIL 17, a grim-faced President had read a statement to the press declaring "there have been major developments in the (Watergate) case . . . real progress has been made in finding the truth . . . (and) I condemn any attempts to cover up in this case no matter who is involved."

He had named Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen to find the elusive truth and prosecute the case. His choice did not meet with universal favor.

Senate Majority Whip Robert Byrd (D.-Va.) complained that on September 6, 1972 in an attack on Senator George McGovern (Democratic presidential candidate), Petersen had said the Watergate investigation (the first one) had been "conducted under my supervision (and) all aspects of the break-in and bugging were studied in detail, including questions about the source and distribution of any funds relating to the incident."

## More Bombs

But the press refused to wait for truth to flow from the second Petersen investigation, and as it had since the June 17 break-in—particularly the Washington Post—it kept dropping bombs that rocked the White House.

Former GOP chairman Senator Robert Dole of Kansas was not contented either. He publicly called for the resignation of the President's two closest aides, H. R. Haldeman, chief-of-staff, and John Ehrlichman, domestic chief. "If they have any dedication and loyalty to the President, they can show it by resigning. Right now the credibility of the Administration is zero."

Then a week ago, L. Patrick Gray III, the acting head of the FBI who failed to win Senate confirmation because of his handling of Watergate, disclosed to investigators that on June 28 he had met with Ehrlichman

## The Nation

and John W. Dean 3rd, the President's counsel, and was given some files taken from convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.'s safe.

### 'Burn Bag'

Gray recalled that Dean said the papers "should never see the light of day," so he subsequently put them in the FBI "burn bag" and they were destroyed—without his ever looking at them. Ehrlichman subsequently confirmed the meeting.

Following that disclosure Gray resigned. Jeb Stuart Magruder, once No. 2 man in the Committee to Re-elect the President and presently a \$36,000-a-year director of policy development in the Commerce Department, also resigned.

Last weekend, President Nixon suddenly called in William D. Ruckelshaus, administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and told him to take over Gray's post. Then the President cancelled a top level conference with his economic advisers and flew off to Camp David, the mountain-top retreat in Maryland.

And Monday evening the President spoke over nationwide television. He had seldom seemed so grim, almost glum. Nor when he ended 27 minutes later had he ever seemed so near to tears.

With the family photo just behind his right shoulder and a small American flag in his lapel, the President told listeners:

In 1972 he had delegated the responsibility for running his campaign—the first time he had ever done so—because he was too concerned with more impor-

tant affairs—making peace in Vietnam, keeping the peace in the Middle East and so on.

He was "appalled" and "shocked" when he heard of the Watergate bugging last June 17 (he subsequently called it "incredible jackassery") and appointed trusted White House officials to look into the affair. (Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler at the time had refused even to comment on "a third-rate burglary.")

### 'Lessen Is Clean'

Mr. Nixon, however, said he could see how it happened. "I know how it can be very easy under this intense pressure to fall into shady tactics . . . Both of our great parties have been guilty of

## 'Both . . . parties have been guilty of excesses'

such tactics in the past . . . (and it) may have been a response by one side to the excesses" of the other side."

The President said he was addressing himself to the Watergate problem now so that he and the rest of the government could get back to work to fulfill his dreams for America. No longer working, however, would be "two of my closest friends and most trusted assistants in the White House."

He was accepting the resignations of Haldeman (who had once reputedly said, "Every President needs an SOB and I'm Nixon's") and Ehrlichman, the two men who had most contact with him daily.

This move should not "be seen by anyone as evidence of any wrongdoing by either one," the President added.



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THE PRESIDENT

Also resigning was Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, whom he considered "a great public servant."

Mr. Nixon announced he had "asked for and accepted" the resignation of John W. Dean III as White House counsel.

"There can be," he said, "no whitewash at the White House." Those guilty of "specific criminal actions . . . must pay the penalty . . ." While "the easiest course would be for me to blame those to whom I delegated the responsibility to run the (1972) campaign . . . that would be the cowardly thing to do.

"I will not place the blame on subordinates, on people whose zeal exceeded their judgment and who may have done wrong in a cause they deeply believed to be right . . . (the man at the top) must bear the responsibility . . . I accept it."

'Give Me Hell'

The President found a few words to commend the courts, the American system and the "free press" for having persisted in uncovering Watergate. And after the speech he suddenly appeared in the press room unaccompanied by guards or Ziegler and stood at Ziegler's podium. His voice was low and he appeared shaken:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the press, we have had our differences in the past, and I hope I'm worthy of your time you think I'm wrong. I hope I'm worthy of your trust."

Next day New York Times reporters said government investigators told them they now had evidence of an elaborate coverup plan coordinated by Presidential advisers Haldeman and Ehrlichman, with former Attorney General John Mktchell, Dean, Magruder and a Frederick LaRue also involved.

Everyone was to deny any knowledge of the affair and over \$100,000 was to be used to buy the silence of the seven men subsequently convicted of conspiracy, burglary and wiretap at Watergate.

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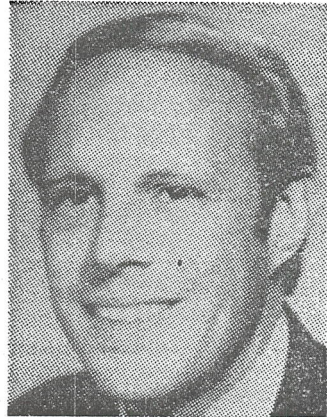
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