

W/5

SF Chronicle
Wed., June 2, 1976

JUN 2 1976

people

San Francisco Chronicle 17

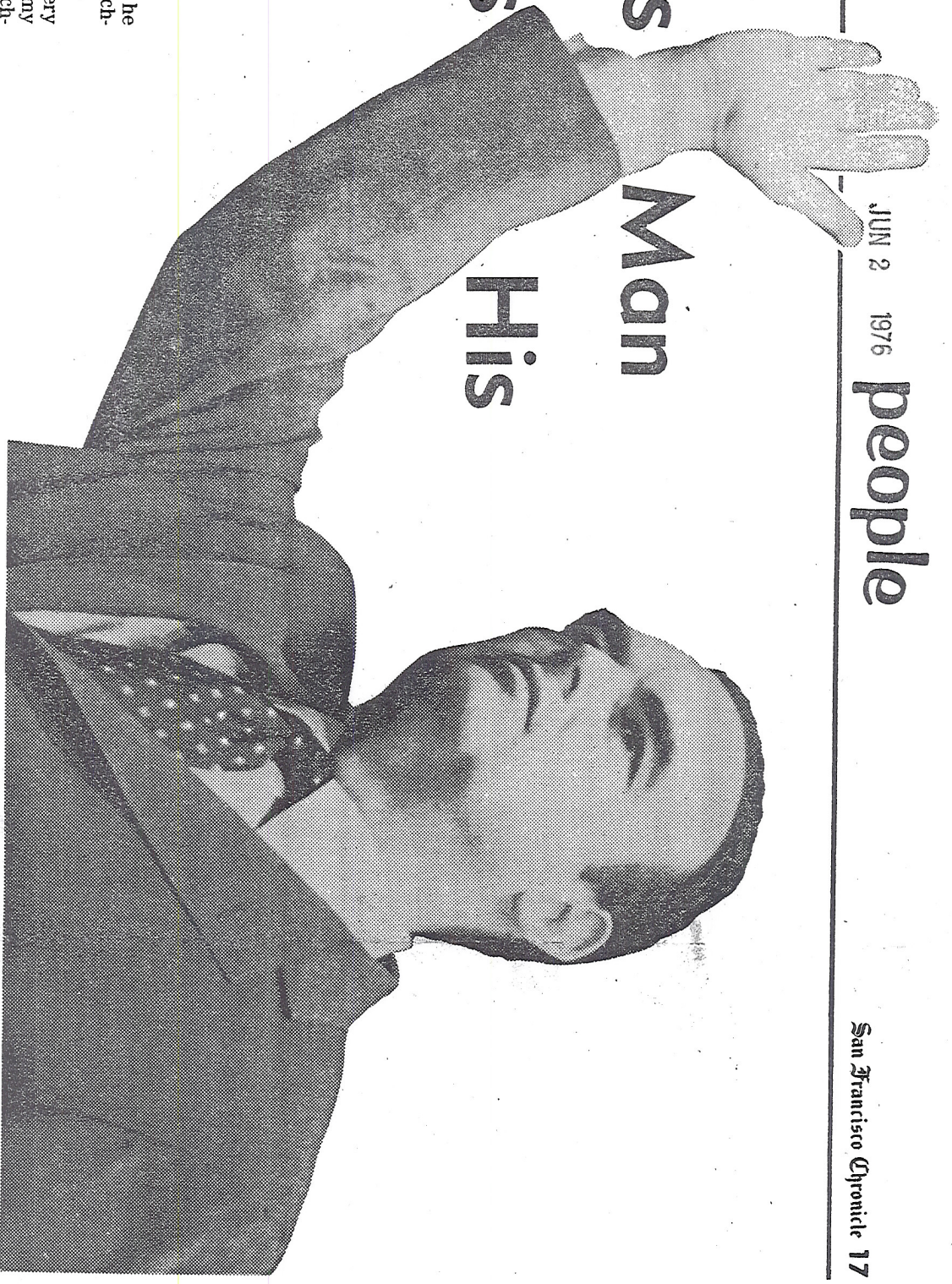
Nixon's Speaks Piece Man His

By Frank Clifford
Newsday

Santa Fe, N.M.

John D. Ehrlichman says he felt compelled to conform to Richard Nixon's way of doing things.

"I had every reason to be very humble about my talents and my capacity to judge," said Ehrlich-



John Ehrlichman, above, taking the oath before the Senate Watergate Committee and,

man, reflecting on the four years he served as former President Nixon's legal counsel and top assistant on domestic affairs.

"I was coming from the woods of the Northwest, and I had no sense of the presidency." He had been practicing law in Seattle before going to work in the White House in 1969. "I was very, very cautious about substituting my judgment for Nixon's. I had to adapt to his sense of the presidency."

And that adaptation demanded a stylistic conformity as well as an intellectual one, he said during a recent interview with the Santa Fe Reporter, a weekly newspaper.

"If you're going to work for a person whose code includes coats and ties and forbids beards and demands short haircuts, then you either do that or you don't work for him. Where my own desires or lifestyle might otherwise have developed along certain lines, given the fashions of the times," he said, "being part of an organization which had certain standards, obviously it was incumbent on me to go along."

Today, Ehrlichman seems more his own man. Many mornings he divides his time between writing fiction and tilling a small vegetable garden outside his rented hillside cottage. He and his wife, Jeanne, are separated.

Ehrlichman's new novel features a thinly disguised Nixon White House, and he is at work on a second.

But even during his White House tenure, said Ehrlichman, there were limits to his capacity for obeisance to the mold. He said he and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, former U.N. ambassador, were probably the only White House staffers who refused to display pictures of Nixon in their offices. "I didn't want a shrine to Richard Nixon," Ehrlichman said. "It wasn't my style."

Furthermore, he said, "I did not wear an American flag pin in my lapel and would not, in spite of how many thousands of them were handed to me."

Ehrlichman's conviction was



at left, in his new life as a private citizen in the Southwest

upheld last month for his part in the 1971 break-in by White House "plumbers" of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. His attorneys are considering an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Ehrlichman said he did not approve of or know of a plan to burglarize the psychiatrist's office but he said he had "approved an operation to get information" on Ellsberg, the man who made public the Pentagon Papers.

About his role in the Watergate coverup Ehrlichman would say only that he had been misled by President Nixon.

He said he felt a "great disappointment" in Nixon when he heard the infamous June 23, 1972, taped conversation between Nixon and his chief of staff, H.R. Halde- man.

Asked if he joined in later efforts to persuade the Watergate burglars not to cooperate with the investigators, he said, "I'm not going to take that question. That's at the core of the whole litigation."

Ehrlichman's style of life since coming to Santa Fe more than a year ago has changed drastically.

He lives in a four-room house on a dirt lane. He spends a great deal of time by himself, but dates local women. He also is working for the interests of Indian education in the Southwest, a youth hostel in Santa Fe and the proposed restoration of a historic mountain village.

Ehrlichman insists that he is sincere in what he is doing. "I would like to stay here," he said.

The day of the interview Ehrlichman wore a pair of rum-

pled khaki pants and desert boots. His well-publicized beard has grown fuller and shaggier.

"I've talked about things that I hadn't talked about in over a year, things that I couldn't bring myself to talk about," he said. "But I'm glad I did it. I'm glad because I've learned something about myself by talking. I've learned that I'm no longer bitter."

If all his court appeals fail and he must go to jail, Ehrlichman believes that the judgment of history, at least, will be less severe.

One result of recent congressional inquiries, he said, is that the public is beginning to learn what political insiders have known for years — that illegal acts have been committed during the past four administrations, probably with the acquiescence of high officials.

A lot of government business is done "on acquiescence," he said. "And that acquiescence to what Johnson and Kennedy and Truman and Roosevelt did was withheld in the case of Nixon," he said.

"To say, well, Nixon shouldn't have done those things because technically they were against the law or constitutionally improper is correct as far as it goes," he said. "But it ignores the whole body of custom and acquiescence on which Nixon relied unjustifiably and a lot of other people relied on."

Ehrlichman said he did not know if the government could operate successfully without some degree of acquiescence to practices that are not technically legal.

"That's a conundrum, you see," he said. "The Ford Administration is proving now that you can conduct the office without doing those things . . ."

"The ultimate question cannot be is it possible to conduct the presidency without doing those things," he said. Rather the question should be, "Would a reasonable man under a similar set of circumstances be justified in doing these things?"
