

The 'President's Lawyer'

The 'Good Guy' Mitchell Image

By Haynes Johnson
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In that wonderful way of Washington, now there is another political phenomenon to ponder.

John Mitchell, that supposedly fearsome repressor of radical rhetoric, has been transformed into a good guy of American government. At least that's the picture that emerged clearly yesterday

when the president's lawyer, as his wife Martha likes to call him, met the press for the first time in exactly a year.

The Attorney General, holding court in the great Hall of Justice, was a kindly and conciliatory figure. He had a good word for all—for blacks, for students, for dissenters, for Congress, for the Supreme Court, for individual rights.

To every question, about

virtually every problem that has arisen in the last year from Spiro Agnew's comments to Cambodia and the campuses, Mitchell responded with patience and humor.

He never—ever—raised his voice in anger. When Sarah McClendon, a reporter with a penchant for asking needling and rhetorical questions, warned that she was going to give him a "long and involved" one, Mitchell said "so what's new?" He said it softly, and with a smile.

For the rest of the hour-long conference, the President's former law partner and a man with a reputation as the recluse of the administration, was clearly in command, as he fielded questions ranging from the 18-year-old vote in wiretapping to black panthers, from impeachment proceedings against Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, to political problems confronting the Nixon Administration.

As he remarked lightly at one point, any good lawyer can take any side of a case and argue it with equal ability. But for Mitchell there is clearly only one client to be defended yesterday—the Administration. He presented that case in low key; if there were any problems, it was because of a misunderstanding of the Administration's true motives.

"If the campuses as such look upon what we're doing as representative, it's because they're not getting the message," he said, in response to one question.

The same was true of certain spokesmen in the black community who have criti-

cized the administration.

In the same vein, he spoke positively about the necessity to end discriminatory practices in southern schools. Mitchell said he sees the day coming soon "when desegregation will be accepted as a fact of life" and the process of education can go forward.

He went on record as saying he thinks that time is fast approaching. After the 1970-71 school year, he said, "not only will the school districts in the South have converted" from dual to unitary systems, but that "most of the irritants" produced by desegregation "will be behind us..."

At the outset, Mitchell dealt with other critics who have questioned whether the administration really is squarely behind the right of 18 year olds to vote. He is writing all 50 state governors, he said, requesting written assurances by August 3 that they are taking all necessary steps to comply with the 1970 voting rights act amendments.



AP Wirephoto

ATTORNEY-GENERAL JOHN MITCHELL
Kindness and concern for all