

Some Questions for Nixon

WASHINGTON — One of my clearest memories of John F. Kennedy is of him standing in the State Department basement, cursing the press, as he prepared to go out and face another barrage of reporters' questions.

And there was Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, sipping beer in Saigon at 4 a.m., doing a little soliloquy on how, if he ever became President, "the goddam New York Times won't dictate to me."

THE PRESS has a way of becoming a pain in the esophagus to all politicians, and most of all to Presidents. Especially in years when they seek reelection. So they all seize one excuse or another to avoid those sessions where newsmen ask irritating, embarrassing questions.

I am neither surprised nor pushed to indignation, then, by the fact that President Nixon is now avoiding press conferences.

John D. Ehrlichman, Mr. Nixon's domestic affairs adviser, who has pre-empted the roles of Herb Klein, Ron Ziegler, John Scali and all the other administration communications experts, has set out to give the country an explanation as to why Mr. Nixon isn't holding any news conferences.

First, Ehrlichman says, Mr. Nixon's been busy. More important, newsmen ask "a lot of flabby and fairly dumb questions," and this bothers Mr. Nixon, according to his domestic expert.

So how can you blame Ehrlichman for wanting better quality questions? At the risk of appearing flabby and dumb, I suggest a few:

● "Mr. President, why don't you reveal to the American people who gave \$10 million to finance your reelection to all those dummy Republican committees just before the new campaign spending law went into effect?"

● "Mr. President, unemployment continues at the 6 percent level, inflation rolls on, our balance of payments was \$3.2 billion in the red in the first quarter of 1972. Do you still insist that your economic game plan is working?"

● "Mr. President, you pledged to wipe out the hunger that is so rampant among America's children and aged. Why has your administration refused to spend almost half a billion dollars that Congress allocated for food stamps this year?"

The real dummy is the person who thinks the President wants to answer questions like that.

EHRlichman SAYS the President is in journalistic exile for reasons other than the quality of newsmen's questions. He says reporters are "like insecure young ladies," and that they "have to put on a show" when those television cameras start rolling.

Sure newsmen are hams. Think of how often you see belly dancers sitting on reporters' laps during those televised press conferences!