

Fuller column
MXPost 26 Jun,
filed W/gate



Nixon's Solitude For Ex-Aides

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THE BEST GUIDE to where it's at in Watergate is provided by the White House attitude toward the major figures implicated in the testimony of John W. Dean III. Abundant corroborative evidence on almost all of those men has surfaced over and over again.

If the President was truly innocent, he would presumably try to force the truth from the men who so abused his confidence. But far from putting on the pressure, Mr. Nixon has been playing sweet violins to men almost surely guilty of truly awful crimes.

Consider the case of H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff who figured as No. 1 Watergate villain in the Dean version. Sworn testimony by a reputable military officer has placed Haldeman smack in the middle of the Watergate cover-up. In particular, there is persuasive evidence that Haldeman tried to mobilize the CIA to interfere with the FBI investigation of the case.

But there has been no public word of criticism from the White House about Haldeman. On the contrary, in accepting the Haldeman resignation of April 30, Mr. Nixon called him "one of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

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THEN THERE is the case of John Ehrlichman, the former chief White House aide on domestic affairs who figures as No. 2 bad guy in the Dean testimony. Impressive testimony from third parties shows that Ehrlichman had advance knowledge of the effort to burglarize the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist back in 1971. Two persons have in-

dicated that Ehrlichman played at least a part in the destruction of government documents taken from the safe of one of the Watergate burglars.

The President, judging from logs of his conversations put out by the White House, knew much of that in mid-March, and almost all of it in mid-April. But Ehrlichman, like Haldeman, was let go only on April 30. In accepting his resignation, Mr. Nixon also called him "one of the finest public servants it has been my privilege to know."

Another critical figure in the Dean testimony is former Attorney General John Mitchell. After lying about it, Mitchell has acknowledged that he heard advance discussions of what became the Watergate break-in. Several credible witnesses have indicated that Mitchell approved the Watergate break-in.

But apart from occasional signs of nervousness at the popping off of Martha Mitchell, the White House has said nothing adverse with respect to Mitchell in public.

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THE SOLICITUDE shown for these men by Mr. Nixon cannot seriously be put down to scrupulous regard for the workings of the judicial process.

In fact, the pattern of events suggests a contrary motive. Mr. Nixon seems to be flattering, protecting and otherwise sweetening precisely those who are in position to tell the truth and assure that justice be done. Maybe his motive isn't to buy their silence. But he certainly isn't behaving with the outraged sense normal to an innocent leader betrayed by the men he most trusted.