

he can find one prestigious enough who is willing to take the Haldeman job.

"The President needs recognized symbols of integrity around him if he is to continue his effectiveness," says one aide.

The presidential preoccupation with Watergate and the widespread in-house belief that Haldeman is on the way out have inculcated an attitude of drift within the White House that was rarely present at any time during the first four years.

For instance, it was widely believed at the White House last week that the President would issue an Easter-eve statement imposing stringent new controls to halt the spiraling food price increases. But the Labor Department on Friday announced the worst food price increases in 22 years. And the President did not even take his economic advisers with him on his extended weekend trip to Key Biscayne.

Besides family members and the White House physician, only press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, secretary Rose Mary Woods, appointments secretary Steve Bull and military aide Maj. John V. Brennan accompanied Mr. Nixon to Florida, one of the smallest contingents that the President has ever taken to Florida on a long weekend trip.

Ehrlichmann was supposed to make the trip, but Ziegler announced he was spending the weekend with his family. He made the same announcement about Haldeman, who usually goes everywhere with the President.

The family members of the Nixon entourage behaved as if they were on holiday during the President's brief meeting with 200 wellwishers who greeted him at Homestead Air Force Base. They laughed and joked in evident anticipation of their five days in southern Florida, which is enjoying balmy and rather mild weather for this time of year.

On such outings the President frequently relaxes by going out to dinner at the Hasta, his favorite Cuban restaurant, in the company of his longtime friend C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo. But Mr. Nixon ate in the compound of the Key Biscayne White House on Good Friday after, in Ziegler's words, "Studying papers in flight."

And Ziegler did not hold

# Nixon Staff Is Losing Faith

## And the 'After-Haldeman' Speculation Flourishes

By Lou Cannon

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KEY BISCAIYNE, Fla.—The other night when Richard Nixon took a two-hour cruise on the presidential yacht, Sequoia, one White House staffer asked another who had accompanied the President. The aide was told that the President had gone alone.

"I found myself wondering," the first aide recalled later, "who it was that the President had really taken with him."

There is nothing surprising about the President taking a solitary cruise in the middle of his latest and most damaging crisis. It has been his pattern in every crisis of the past, and his privacy has often been the prelude to the announcement of an unanticipated and dramatic strategy.

But the aide's suspicion about what in this case was the truth is itself more reflective than anything his superiors, or even the President, are likely to say about the most important change within the White House. For the first time, the President now lacks credibility within his own official family. For the first time, his words and actions are being doubted by those who have loyally followed him, who labored for his re-election and who

value him as a decisive and capable Chief Executive.

"I've thought of just quietly quitting and getting myself a business job," says one such staffer. "But if I left now it would look like I had something to do with Watergate, which I don't. And my friends who stayed behind would think me an informer or a newspaper source. So I've just tried to do my job and forget about it. Some days I don't even read the morning paper."

Another lower-level staffer says he thought of circulating a petition to President Nixon's chief domestic affairs adviser, John D. Ehrlichman.

See CRUISE, A5, Col. 1

### CRUISE, From A1

ichman, expressing the disgust of White House staffers at the way the Watergate investigation has been handled. He discarded the idea.

"The only thing that

would happen is that all of us who signed the petition would be fired," he said. "It wouldn't accomplish a thing."

This aide believes that most members of the White House staff are "basically subservient, do-as-you're told types" who are likely to remain loyal to the President no matter what happens.

In his own case this aide says that he thought many times about quitting, but has decided to stick it out.

Perhaps there are many such White House staffers who feel the same way and regard the others as "basically subservient."

One aide tells of a party the other night, attended mostly but not exclusively by White House people, where everyone "looked at each other suspiciously, drank with great care and never mentioned Watergate." He compared it to a scene from "The Godfather" and to the Mafia tradition of "omerta," the code of silence.

### Anything but Silent

Unlike the members of the Corleone "family" in "The Godfather," however, the White House aides purportedly implicated in the Watergate case have been anything but silent. And there are some indications that the high-level talkativeness has become contagious.

"I'm kind of fascinated by it," says a White House secretary who admits she thought the Watergate case was "just newspaper talk" during the campaign. "It's fascinating to pick up the paper every day and read something about people you know and wonder, who's going to be named next."

She believes her "fascination" is widely shared among her friends at the White House and says that the subject has become a staple, if guarded, subject of conversation at the White House mess.

Much of the interest among White House staffers centers on what will happen "after Haldeman." It is an unstated presumption among staffers who are willing to talk about it at all that No. 1 presidential aide H. R. Haldeman will leave, whether or not he turns out to have had knowledge of

the Watergate.

"What Bob had going for him was his competence," says one staffer who has never particularly liked him. "That's all blown away now no matter what happens."

Though Haldeman has been frequently linked in teutonic name association outside the White House with Ehrlichman, the two men are seen as distinctly unlike within the cloistered confines of the White House.

Ehrlichman is considered more approachable, less suspicious, more interested in the content of specific programs. He is by far the more popular figure of the two.

But it is also considered unlikely that Ehrlichman will take over Haldeman's role. In fact, some staffers believe there never will be "another Haldeman" in the Nixon administration, although someone clearly will wind up with the key assignment of controlling access to the President.

### Adams Recalled

It is this "Gatekeeper" role that is widely considered the source of Haldeman's power in the Nixon administration—as it was the source of Sherman Adams' power under President Eisenhower. But Haldeman has vastly more power than Adams had because he has also exercised a line-officer operational authority of controlling staff and office assignments.

There is much technical talk among White House staffers interested in that sort of thing of splitting the duties of the next No. 1 assistant, whoever he is. This would leave Haldeman's successor functioning pretty much as a private executive secretary rather than the operational boss of the White House.

This "after Haldeman" speculation is freely indulged in by White House staffers, even those who feel inhibited about discussing the Watergate case with outsiders. One frequently advanced speculation is that the President will turn to a non-White House staffer of recognized integrity, perhaps even to a Democrat, if

his usual briefing for reporters Saturday. Instead, he sent his deputy Gerald Warren, to post a notice on the press center bulletin board which said that the Presi-

dent was in his study at 8:30 a.m. "going over papers and making a number of phone calls. He will be spending time this weekend with his family."