

# Collection of Networks

By Elizabeth Drew

WASHINGTON—The stunning succession with which Watergate events bombarded this city heightened some of its characteristic reactions to upheaval.

We often talk about, or are asked about, what "Washington" is thinking or something called "the mood of Washington," without it being very clear just who or what it is that is doing the thinking or having the mood. It would be absurd to suppose that at any given moment Richard Nixon and Art Buchwald and Edward M. Kennedy and Anna Chenault and Ralph Nader and the White House correspondent for a Midwestern newspaper are all in the same mood.

In this context, "Washington" is that collection of networks consisting of some officials and politicians and journalists and also of permanent, invisible Washington: the nonfamous Government workers and lawyers and lobbyists and hangers-on; the geological strata of several Administrations' worth of former officials; the people who populate the infinite trade associations and write the newsletters to the troops and make the calls to the home offices.

This collection of people makes up Washington's nervous system. It is their business, or they make it their business, to know what is "going on." They share car pools and talk on the telephone—"Washington" is addicted to the telephone—and know whom they are likely to encounter at which cafeterias and restaurants.

People who do and do not have anything to do with the events, who may or may not affect them or be affected by them, talk about them over the phone and over their meals; they trade scraps of information, try to impute meaning where there may not be any, speculate about things they cannot know, and wonder how it is being taken "out there."

Moreover, "Washington" is accustomed to patterns; to knowing what is what and how it works and who is up and who is down. It determines these things through a complex set of signals which everyone understands. It is skilled at reading between the lines of the newspapers to determine who is doing what, or leaking what, to whom. It makes its business—and many of its personal—arrangements accordingly. When the patterns and signals change too rapidly, when things seem unfamiliar and unpredictable and even out of control, "Washington" becomes anxious.

There is another characteristic of "Washington" that is important to understand in order to grasp its particular reaction to Watergate. The

people who make up "Washington" have an odd combination of cynicism and respect for its political framework. They know how delicate that framework is. They are interested in, or care about, government, or they wouldn't be here.

They know that politicians and public figures are human beings and they know, from long experience, that at least some of them can be scoundrels and liars. The cynicism helps them cope. They stand up when they hear "Hail to the Chief" and they think it matters who is Attorney General. They respect and fear, power. They create their illusions. When the illusions are destroyed, even if they are in on the destruction, they can become disturbed and shaken.

Some glimpses of the last three weeks: before the dam broke, at the annual dinner of the White House Correspondents' Association. The occasion is one at which the professional antagonisms between the press corps and the officials are to be tossed aside for an evening of bonhomie, but this year it is not possible.

It is arranged that the President and Mrs. Nixon will arrive late, after Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein of The Washington Post receive two awards for their investigative reporting of Watergate. As the awards are presented, the Cabinet sits stone-faced behind the raised dais.

As the story begins to break, at the Federal City Club, where permanent Washington lunches, lawyers and journalists table-hop and trade stories. A lady says she must make a speech soon, and asks if anyone knows any good Watergate jokes.

At the Sans Souci, a White House aide and his wife lunch quietly in one corner. At another table Colson gives a friendly wave to Joseph Califano and Edward Bennett Williams. Everyone notes.

A journalist wonders aloud whether he should have spent more time cultivating Len Garment.

Some liberals realize that they have a new dilemma: they used to argue that the director of the F.B.I. should be accountable to the Administration. Pat Gray was.

A sophisticated, sensitive Washingtonian, one frequently turned to by journalists seeking a sense of things, says that younger people who might come to power will not learn from this not to do these things, but to do them better.

No one is sure when there will be a new sense of things.

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