

**Kevin Phillips**

## The Inner Circle Disaster

WASHINGTON — To many Americans, the resignations of Messrs. Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Dean and Kleindienst may mark the collapse of the Nixon Administration and of Republican ambitions to forge a new national majority.

I could not disagree more, but my explanation must, of necessity, be something of a personal one. As background, let me say that I worked in the 1968 Nixon campaign and served in the administration until Spring, 1970, when I resigned to begin writing this column. Based on my personal experience, I had little use for Haldeman and Ehrlichman and the way they ran the White House, and from time to time I said

THESE AND KINDRED observations were sometimes dismissed as sour grapes. Now that it is no longer a lonely task to argue that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Company have been an albatross around the neck of the Republican Party and its future, it may be appropriate to wax optimistic about the party's prospects without them.

During the 1968 campaign, as the several factors around the future President were jockeying for power, one member of the Haldeman-Ehrlichman clique bragged to me that his side would win — and he quoted his leaders — because "we've got the body." The body he referred to was that of Mr. Nixon.

Quite simply, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, together with their coterie of aides and flunkies, planned to use their control of the President's personal and staff apparatus to build themselves an unprecedented political empire. Lamentably, the President was extraordinarily vulnerable because of his day-to-day managerial incapacity and his great dislike of face-to-face conflict or participation in policy disputes between subordinates.

Under the auspices of Haldeman and Ehrlichman, the White House filled up with pretty boys, admen, efficiency experts and other people whose political competence ranged from negligible to invisible. With no broader political experience than sidling up to Richard Nixon, with no commitment to ideas or ideology, and with no broader political goal than selfish aggrandizement of White House power, the Haldeman-Ehrlichman combine has been a disaster for the administration and for the Republican Party. In retrospect, former Attorney General John Mitchell seems to have been similarly narrow and culpable. The failure is much bigger than the Watergate alone.

Politically, the hegemony of the Haldemans, Ehrlichmans and Mitchells has been a disaster. The 1970 congressional campaigns, run out of the White House, were a shrill travesty on "law and order" and a forfeiture of the GOP opportunity to make real ideological strides. As late as 1971, liberal welfare and school-busing panaceas were being advanced rather than condemned by the White House.

ANYBODY WHO BLAMES the Republican Party for the Watergate activities of these people is grievously mistaken. Time after time, disillusioned Republicans have met secretly to plot — alas, futilely — how the Haldeman-Ehrlichman hegemony could be broken.

Thus, many Republicans are delighted that the stranglehold of this alien clique has been broken. Now the White House may open up to talent. Ideas and ideology may come to the fore, and the Republican Party can have a new chance to grasp the opportunity and challenge of national realignment. No U.S. political revolution could have been fully consummated with the shallow, gimmickry-minded Waterbuggers in the White House saddle.