



The Big Clean-Up After Watergate

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Fuller version, Wx Post 8 May 73; omissions at points marked here (X).

THE PRESIDENT'S latest set of appointments make a liar of the vicious charge that those trying to get at the truth about Watergate are undermining the national interest. By themselves, the new men at the Justice Department, and particularly General Alexander Haig, who goes to the White House, improve the efficacy of government many times over. (X)

The most striking improvement has come at the Federal Bureau of Investigation. L. Patrick Gray, the acting director forced out by Watergate, was far too starry-eyed about the President to be a good leader. His confession that he destroyed documents relevant to the Watergate inquiry on the instruction of White House aides is a sign of how far he was prepared to go in making the FBI into a private police force for Mr. Nixon.

By contrast, William Ruckelshaus, who is now acting director, is a paragon of brains and independence. (X)

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THE CHANGE in the office of Attorney General registers almost as dramatic an advance. Richard Kleindienst, who has stepped down, seemed to me far more principled than generally recognized on such matters as civil rights and civil liberties. But he was so much of a hip-shooter, so disposed to sign documents without reading them, so impulsive in his judgments, that his principles rarely came into effective play.

Elliot Richardson, who leaves Defense to go to Justice, has recently shown a distinct willingness to compromise principle in the interest of personal ambition. But Richardson has always been master of his

brief, and he has compromised only at the margin. He will set high standards for the Justice Department, and his weakness for giving sacred ground to the President will almost surely be stiffened by the intense public scrutiny bound to focus on anything he does relating to Watergate. That much has already been proved by the decision to appoint a special Watergate prosecutor.

Probably the most hopeful change comes at the White House, where Haig replaces Haldeman as chief of staff. To be sure Haig is an ambitious Army man on his way to becoming a very young chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (X)

Haig's interest is to come to the White House for a short but drastic clean-up and then return to the Pentagon. For that purpose he is the ideal man. He is direct, forceful and free of hang-ups. He is not paranoiac about the Congress or the liberal Democrats. (X)

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THE BIG UNKNOWN in all this is the outlook of President Nixon. Various comments — including his promise of tighter legislation — make it sound as though Mr. Nixon thinks ~~the~~ Watergate is just one more story of political corruption.

In fact what is involved is the use of previously inviolate institutions of law enforcement and security for personal political goals. The right guarantee against that danger is not new laws. It is the appointment of sturdy and independent men, animated by more than blind personal loyalty, to the top posts around the presidency. Such men exist in abundance. The cure for Watergate, in other words, is at hand. But can Mr. Nixon take the medicine?