

# HOW THE REPUBLICAN PROS READ THE CRISIS

By Hal Bruno

Now that the President's unpopular palace guard has been removed from the scene, Republican leaders are willing to help extricate Richard Nixon from the wreckage of Watergate—if it's possible and if he really means to be a President who cares what happens to his party. The party leaders would like to save Mr. Nixon if they can, but they no longer see this as a political necessity for their own survival.

That judgment might turn out to be more than a little naive; it implies that the President can somehow be dissociated from his party, or that the party can disavow its own head. But the GOP leaders point out that Mr. Nixon began the process, first surrounding himself with aides who had little political background and then running alone in last year's re-election campaign. "The President's campaign was kept separate from the party," says GOP National Committee counsel Harry Dent. "There's no way the Democrats can use Watergate to



hurt individual Republicans in 1974." That remains to be seen.

Sen. Barry Goldwater and other conservatives joined Republican moderates in supporting Sen. Charles Percy's resolution calling for a special prosecutor to handle the Watergate investigation because they know that full disclosure is essential to the GOP. They presume it also will help Mr. Nixon, but their unsolicited rescue operation cannot save the President if he has anything to hide. If he is implicated, then Richard Nixon becomes expendable to the party, which has no intention of drowning with him.

**Crippled:** At least temporarily, the President has lost his power to tell the party whom he prefers as his successor in 1976. "He's a lame duck who has been crippled, and every day that goes by is one less reason why the party or Congress has to do his bidding," a Republican loyalist says. "What they want now is a President who will start to care what happens to them and what they think. He'd better start inviting some congressmen aboard Air Force One."

Only a month ago it was Congress and the party that were being treated as expendable by the White House staffers who have now become casualties of Watergate. According to bitter Republi-

cans, H.R. Haldeman and John Ehrlichman set the tone for an Administration that isolated the President and ignored or abused congressmen, senators, governors and respected party leaders.

What's worse, party regulars say, the Nixon men were political amateurs. Sen. Robert Dole, an ex-national chairman who was ousted by the Nixon crew, says: "They were not of the party, they didn't know politics or people, they only knew power and arrogance." Barry Goldwater believes the White House staff had the President so isolated that he didn't know what was happening. "He never called on the pros," Goldwater says with amazement. "Even Eisenhower had a closer rapport with the leadership of the party—and he wasn't even a politician."

Republicans have learned a hard lesson from Watergate, and in it there's a warning for all of their would-be Presidential candidates. A Southern leader puts it: "When we go to discuss candidates for 1976, the question at the top of the list will be, 'What are you going to do to build the party if you get to be President—and what will you do for the party even if you don't make it?'"

Whoever wants the 1976 Republican nomination had better be able to answer that question in precise detail.