

Trying to Govern as the Fire Grows Hotter

Let me remind you that the finest steel has to go through the hottest fire.

PRESIDENT NIXON used that self-reassuring image last week at a White House staff meeting. The next day, he repeated it at a Cabinet meeting. It so inspired him that he repeated it once again at a Republican fund-raising dinner. Nixon and his far from steely Administration desperately needed reassurance: the fire kept getting hotter, and at times it seemed to be out of control. The dominant question each day was: What next?

Former Attorney General John Mitchell, once Nixon's closest political adviser, was indicted for perjury and conspiracy to defraud; so was Nixon's chief campaign fund raiser, former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans. The ardently prepared prosecution of Daniel Ellsberg for leaking the Pentagon papers was dismissed because of Government wiretapping, burglary and other misconduct.

It also turned out that the CIA had provided the tools and disguises used in raiding the office of Ellsberg's former psychiatrist, and that approval of their use had come from General Robert Cushman, then deputy head of the CIA and now Commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. For years the American left had drawn a picture of the U.S. spied on by a sort of combined super CIA-FBI dominated by lawless and hidden money. Once dismissed as paranoid fantasies, such visions now acquired a touch of nightmarish truth.

Washington talked of little else. At a luncheon given by Pat Nixon for Senators' wives, the topic was discussed in muted voices, for the Watergate conspirators had sabotaged several Democratic Senators' presidential campaigns. Comedians performing in the capital were egged on to do Watergate routines. Audiences hooted at a parody of Nixon's re-election slogan: "Four more years—with two off for good behavior." More ominously, there was open speculation, in print as well as in

conversation, about the President's being impeached or having to resign. Even Nixon's bitterest foes dreaded the prospect, if only because it would mean President Spiro Agnew. Congressman Henry Reuss, a liberal Democrat, made a rather fantastic proposal for the resignations of both Nixon and Agnew.

The once awesome façade of presidential power was eroding. Congress, strengthened by the Watergate revelations, began asserting its authority. For the first time, the House rebelled against the President's Viet Nam policies. By 219 to 188, it voted to cut off funds for the continued bombing of Cambodia. The Administration announced that it would continue to bomb anyway, using contingency funds appropriated earlier.

Betrayed. In the Senate, which will open its televised Watergate hearings this week, the Judiciary Committee subjected Attorney General-designate Elliot Richardson to sharp questioning about his appointment of a special prosecutor for Watergate. The issue: Would Richardson or the prosecutor be ultimately responsible? The Senators may very well hold up Richardson's appointment until they are satisfied that the special prosecutor will be truly independent. In an attempt to reassure the Senate, Richardson declared: "I am among those Republican officeholders who feel betrayed by the shoddy display of morals by people whose activities have recently come to light."

Trying to govern in the midst of the crisis, trying to fill the gaping holes caused by the resignation of ten officials involved in Watergate, the President made a series of major new appointments (see chart following page). Either unwilling or unable to bring in outsiders, the President kept reshuffling familiar and trusted figures—some of whom had only recently been reassigned and had just begun to master their new jobs.

A big boost to White House morale was provided by the return of John Connally, former Treasury Secretary and prospective presidential candidate,

who, though rumored to be the next Secretary of State, agreed only to join the White House as an unpaid, untitled adviser. Taking leave from his Houston law practice, Connally plans to spend at least three days a week at the White House, working initially on the reorganization of the staff, energy policy, and wage and price controls. "I'm here to help," the newly converted Republican drawled. "I'll devote as much time as may be needed, and I'll arrange my calendar accordingly."

The President's other major appointments:

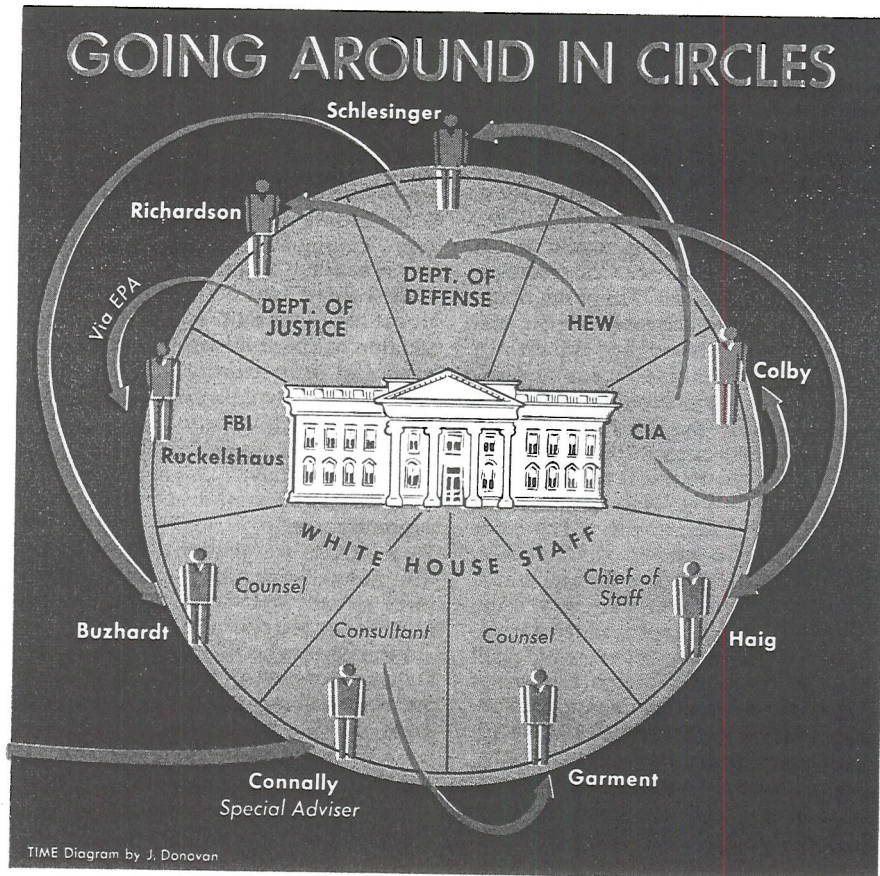
► James R. Schlesinger, 44, who was named director of the CIA only three months ago, to become Secretary of Defense. Nixon's first choice was David Packard, who had earlier served as Deputy Secretary of Defense, but Packard was reluctant to return to the pressures of Washington. Schlesinger, a proven administrator with few political ties, inspired ardent loyalty among his staffers when he directed the Atomic Energy Commission during Nixon's first term. At the CIA, he had begun a reduction in cloak-and-dagger operations, but he leaves that task unfinished.

► William E. Colby, 53, replaces Schlesinger at the CIA. A professional intelligence expert, Colby has worked for the CIA since 1951, keeping what colleagues call a very low profile. Moving to Viet Nam in 1959, he eventually took charge of all CIA operations there, later defending them before a congressional investigating committee. His promotion is said to represent a new policy of assigning more top jobs to Government career men.

► J. Fred Buzhardt Jr., 49, general counsel of the Defense Department, moves to the White House to work in conjunction with Watergate investigators, thus freeing Acting Counsel Leonard Garment to assume the duties previously performed by the ousted John Dean. From 1958 to 1966, Buzhardt served as an aide to Senator Strom Thurmond. Shifting to Defense in 1970, he turned down a request by G.

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Gordon Liddy to take a peek at the department's files on Daniel Ellsberg. Clear it with the Justice Department first, said Buzhardt, showing more independence and sense than numerous other bureaucrats.

As he reshuffled his Administration, Nixon also decreed a new atmosphere at the White House. After months of trying to centralize all decision making, the President decided to decentralize. "It doesn't mean we are abandoning our principles," he explained. "But we are changing our way of working." He dismantled his super Cabinet before it even had a chance to function. "We have to eliminate the feeling that barriers exist between my office and the Cabinet," he said. At the first meeting with the staff that General Alexander Haig is inher-

iting from the vanished H.R. Haldeman, Haig instructed them not to issue too many orders to department and agency heads. "Let's be sure those fellows who have the responsibility for making decisions have enough latitude to do so," Haig said.

The once isolated White House staffers were encouraged to get around more—see Congressmen, see newsmen. William Timmons' congressional liaison staff is to be increased. Reporters accustomed to being shunned or rebuked found their phone calls were being returned and appointments scheduled.

The fallen, meanwhile, were keeping up a brave front. "I'm enjoying my freedom," Ehrlichman told TIME. "I really like these shorter days. I have time at home, time for my kids." And

even time for tennis. What of his future if he is exonerated? "We are just taking one day at a time."

So does the White House as it begins to attend to the nation's business again. Some of its activity is mere flattery; many of the federal departments have been asked to supply news of accomplishments in order to offset Watergate. "We've been getting hysterical requests for stuff from the White House," says an Administration publicity man. "But we just don't have anything to give them."

The White House domestic council is cranking up again under the supervision of Ehrlichman's replacement, Kenneth Cole. Staffers have resumed work on proposals for Congress on revenue sharing and energy policy. Last week Nixon spent four hours with Cole discussing revisions of the bill to set up an independent corporation to handle legal services for the poor. Next week there will be a proposal to Congress for a bipartisan commission on election-campaign reforms.

Up on His Feet. There is evidence that Nixon has still not grasped the magnitude of Watergate. At the funeral Republican fund-raising dinner, which had been scheduled long before and could not be put off (as Barry Goldwater and other Republican stalwarts proposed), he tried to speak as though Watergate were behind him. "We are not going to allow this deplorable incident to deter us or deflect us from going forward toward achieving [our] great goals," he told the party faithful.

His White House aides, some of them recent appointees, spread the word that the President had bounced back. "He is up on the balls of his feet," said one staffer. "There is no sense that Watergate is over, but the terrain has been defined and there is no longer that awful uncertainty about the future."

That was clearly an exaggeration. The President's future is indeed uncertain. It is true that some of the men whom Nixon is appointing and relying on are, for all their familiarity, several cuts above the ones that have been dropped. They may be able to save him from his worst impulses, so assiduously encouraged by the departed palace guard. Optimists are talking about Nixon's "third term" now that Watergate has demolished so many of his second-term plans.

But the President has not even begun to cut through the country's suspicion that he was more deeply involved in Watergate than he has admitted. In the coming weeks and months of testimony, not a great deal more evidence will be needed to involve him directly and to make his position nearly untenable. Even if such evidence is not forthcoming, the steady hammering of questions and revelations, the unfolding on TV of the sordid details of moral corruption in the White House, will make it quite a problem for him to recover from Watergate.

JAMES SCHLESINGER

JOHN CONNALLY

WILLIAM COLBY

