

Watergate Effect On Civil Rights

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The shakeup of the White House staff has left opponents of President Nixon's social and civil rights policies encouraged that there might be some changes for the better for them.

Civil rights leaders, urban and government officials say they expect, at the least, a softening of the administration's position on racial and social matters, if not a complete reversal.

"Watergate seems to have been God-sent," commented an aide to a big city mayor.

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On social matters, some administration opponents feel the President might back off on such issues as the stringent new regulations on welfare and social services. Civil rights officials and leaders believe the White House might now seek to improve relations with them.

Although they are optimistic over the long-range impact of the White House shakeup, these officials say that serious problems exist today.

For example, they complain that it is almost impossible to get answers on important questions from the White House. Further, they note that as many as 25 major jobs remain unfilled in domestic agencies.

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At least one civil rights leader, Bayard Rustin, thinks blacks and liberals should try to exploit the President's position. Rustin, director of the A. Philip Randolph institute, said Watergate had provided an opportunity for breakthroughs and "our job is to

take advantage of Nixon's extraordinary weakness."

But most of those interviewed tried not to convey the impression that they were attacking the President while he was down. And they were unanimous in their dislike for, and pleasure over the departure of, Mr. Nixon's two closest aides, John D. Ehrlichman, domestic affairs adviser, and H. R. Haldeman, chief of staff.

The two aides were held responsible for everything the leaders disliked, from screening the President from opposing viewpoints to influencing the cutbacks in such programs as day care, health and manpower training.

Further, civil rights leaders were particularly perturbed about the administration's opposition to busing and low-income housing in the suburbs and about its plans to shift social programs to the states.