



# The Big Questions Aren't Being Asked

Joseph Alsop

**T**HE INVESTIGATORS of the Watergate horror are plainly enjoying themselves. Maybe this is why there seems to be some reluctance to ask, straight out, the big questions that would end much of the suspense and excitement.

First of all, just who was authorized to act for the President, including giving orders in the President's name? And second, just what were the terms of any such authorizations by President Nixon?

To illustrate these two questions' great urgency, there is the major matter of the interrogations conducted by the FBI after the Watergate break-in. As all know, copies of all these many hundreds of interrogations went to the White House. But it is not known how the copies were circuitously secured for the White House by John Dean III.

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**F**ROM THE beginning of the Justice Department inquiry after the break-in, it must be understood that Dean lied persistently about his own role, both to former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst and to Kleindienst's deputy in charge of Watergate, Henry Petersen.

Dean pretended, in fact, that his grandiose title, "Counsel to the President," represented an operational reality. He claimed to be conducting his own inquiry into the Watergate problem by the President's personal order. He further pretended to be seeing the President constantly and to be reporting to him directly.

Kleindienst is now firmly convinced that Dean saw the President "only once between June 17 last year and March of this year." That once was "for five min-

utes, too, and on personal business" having nothing to do with Watergate. But at the time, it was only natural for Kleindienst and Petersen to assume Dean was telling the truth and to suppose, therefore, that he was acting for the President in a most confidential capacity.

Being misled in this manner, Kleindienst was distinctly embarrassed when Dean asked for copies of the FBI interrogations early in the proceedings.

Because this was "such a political case," Kleindienst told Dean that it would be unwise to give him the verbatim interrogations.

What then happened was only learned by Kleindienst and Petersen much later, during the hearings on the confirmation — or rather nonconfirmation — of acting FBI director L. Patrick Gray. After the rebuff at the Justice Department, John Dean agilely made an end run to the FBI and asked Gray for the FBI interrogations. Gray did not know Dean had already failed with Kleindienst. He followed past precedent. So Dean got the FBI interrogations after all, behind Kleindienst's back.

As anyone can see, Dean made his end run because he well knew that his claim to presidential authority was false.

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**J**OHAN DEAN'S authority to speak for the President was never put to any final test with the President himself. This episode — and there are others — makes an interesting if intricate pattern, but it is a pattern which does not appear to interest Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina and most of his fellow investigators.