

San Francisco Chronicle

THE VOICE OF THE WEST

Charles de Young Thieriot, Editor and Publisher
George T. Cameron, Publisher 1925 to 1955
Founded 1865 by Charles and M. H. de Young

SFChronicle
Editorials

JUN 28 1973

The 'System' and Its Gatemen

IT HAS BEEN WIDELY noted that the sorry Watergate mess has produced one happy fallout, namely the termination of a system in which a White House "palace guard" kept the President of the United States too much isolated from Congress, from members of his Cabinet, from the press and from the people.

Though the Presidential press conference has not yet been resuscitated, Congressmen and cabinet officers report with all due relief that access to the Oval Office has again been opened with the departure of Messrs. Haldeman and Ehrlichman. These were the guards at the inner gate who turned away all but a select few comers, who screened the informational "input," who monitored the output of the press officers, and maintained an all but hermetically tight ship.

THE WATERGATE COMMITTEE has heard that in their zeal to shield the President from all but themselves they went to great lengths to keep demonstrators beyond his ken, and John Dean III has told it that they kept and constantly revised a list of "political enemies," promised to "take care of them" later, and on some occasions did so. They "made trouble," he said, for unfriendly members of the press by arranging special income-tax audits, they tapped the telephones of some and they compiled dossiers of others.

If his testimony is correct, the office of the Chief Executive had under the Haldeman-Ehrlichman management taken on aspects of an absolute monarchy rather than a constitutional democracy and some of the petty harassments they visited upon their "enemies" might well have been extracted from the totalitarian codes.

It is well that Congress and the President can chat again, that Cabinet officers can talk to the boss on matters of official moment, that the White House has broken out of its capsule, and that the Presidential press conference has, at least, re-entered the realm of possibility.