



A Look at the Men Around Nixon

Joseph Kraft

AS AN investigating unit, the Senate Watergate committee is like an outfielder who can only catch a pop fly when the ball is about to hit him on the head. Yet week after week the committee keeps coming up with spectacular new finds. How come?

The answer lies in the nature of the Nixon White House. The President drew around him men who competed furiously to do his bidding or advance his interest. They not only committed horrors, they also mistrusted and hated each other so much that they could not cooperate in hiding the evidence from even the most inept gumshoes.

Consider first the astonishing record of committee discoveries. Last week the committee surfaced an explosive White House memorandum on the administration's secret dealings with ITT. That document alone implicates the President, the Vice President, and several former cabinet members in dubious, and in some cases, criminal actions.

★ ★ ★

BEFORE that the committee stumbled upon the fact that the President had kept secret tapes of his conversations and phone calls. Prior to that the committee walked into the administration's "enemy list."

Behind all of these developments there is the shadow of the President himself. Mr. Nixon moves like a man playing a part in history. He refers unblushingly to "my time on the great world stage."

The other side of that coin is that Mr. Nixon sees his political opponents not merely as men belonging to another party. To him they are connected with beliefs or interests inimical to the national desti-

ny and way of life. They are enemies, out to get him.

Mr. Nixon's original White House staff was built in conformity with those instincts. At its heart, the man closest to him, was the principal figure in last week's Watergate hearings, former White House chief of staff Bob Haldeman. Haldeman quite simply worshipped Mr. Nixon.

★ ★ ★

APART from having this attitude himself, Haldeman tried to enforce it upon everybody else working for the President. The inner atmosphere of the administration, not surprisingly, was one of poisonous acrimony. Feuding among such principal figures as Haldeman, special counsel Charles Colson, counsel John Dean, Attorney General John Mitchell and chief domestic aide John Ehrlichman was constant and almost random in its pattern. All of the big disclosures have come as a result.

The ITT memo was written by Colson in an evident effort to knock out the nomination of Richard Kleindienst to be Mitchell's chosen successor as Attorney General. The enemies list was surfaced by Dean as part of a campaign to get Colson who had been particularly critical of Dean's testimony in the Watergate hearings. The tapes came to light because a Haldeman subordinate, Alexander Butterfield, was not trusted enough to be told that their existence was supposed to be kept from the committee.

Far from running dry as so many have repeatedly predicted, the Watergate investigation will probably continue to yield more sensational discoveries.