

The Harris Survey

Ex-Aides to Nixon Distrusted by Many

By Louis Harris

When he said at his press conference last week that he still believed his former aides, John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman were "two of the finest public officials" he had "ever known" and when he went on to predict they would be exonerated of Watergate charges, President Nixon went a long way toward throwing in his lot with the fate of his two former chief assistants.

Yet evidence from the Harris Survey indicates that public doubts run deep about both Ehrlichman and Haldeman and their testimony before the Senate Watergate committee. An Aug. 18-19 survey of a cross section of 1,536 households probed how much credence the American public had in both Ehrlichman and Haldeman after they had finished testifying before the Ervin committee.

• By 59 to 19 per cent, a majority of the public agreed with the statement that "Ehrlichman and Haldeman were not telling all they knew about Watergate because they were trying to protect President Nixon." Comparable majorities of the public were critical of the testimony of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell on the same grounds.

• The projective statement that "Ehrlichman and Haldeman gave convincing testimony that President Nixon did not know about the Watergate bugging and break-in" met with disagreement by a margin of 49 to 30 per cent. The fact that no more than 30 per cent of the public gave Haldeman and Ehrlichman the benefit of the doubt on their credibility means they are not likely to be a major asset for President Nixon in his efforts to win support on Watergate from American public opinion.

• By a lopsided 73-to-15 per cent margin, nearly three in every four adult Americans thought the President was "wrong" to allow Haldeman to have access to White House tape recordings.

To test the people's confidence in Haldeman's and Ehrlichman's veracity, the cross section was asked:

How truthful do you think (read list) has been in what he has said about the Watergate affair—very truthful, only partly truthful, or hardly truthful?

| | Very Truthful | Only Partly | Hardly At All | Not Sure |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|----------|
| | % | % | % | % |
| John Dean | 20 | 42 | 18 | 20 |
| John Ehrlichman | 7 | 37 | 27 | 28 |
| H. R. Haldeman | 7 | 36 | 26 | 31 |
| John Mitchell | 7 | 32 | 34 | 27 |