

Future Shocks

President Nixon is hiding something from his countrymen and it must be something incriminating. Only deep and dark and very ugly secrets can account for a series of actions which would otherwise have to be judged so contradictory as to call to mind Sen. William Saxbe's (R-Ohio) famous remark, "He must have taken leave of his senses."

The President told us last May that Elliot Richardson was a man of "unimpeachable integrity and rigorously high principle." Again and again he cited his appointment of Richardson as evidence that "justice will be pursued, fairly, fully and impartially, no matter who is involved." Now, he has made it impossible for Richardson to stay at Justice.

The President boasted also of the special prosecutor. When he announced the Richardson appointment, he announced also that Richardson would have the power to name a special prosecutor. Months later, he reminded us—again as evidence of his desire that justice be done—that "with my concurrence, Atty. Gen. Richardson appointed a special prosecutor."

The President made a national issue of the tapes, endlessly contending that to surrender them would be to weaken his office for himself and his successors. But as soon as Cox and Richardson had departed, the tapes were suddenly of no consequence. Judge Sirica could have them. Is this because there will be no special prosecutor to ensure their accuracy?

The suspicion is strong here that Archibald Cox was on to something. Was it a secret retirement fund? Did it have to do with the \$2 million promise from the milk producers? Did it have to do with San Clemente or Key Biscayne? Was Bebe Rebozo involved? Is there a million dollars in surplus campaign funds left over from 1968

still unaccounted for? If Cox heard the tapes, might he find the clue and ask for more tapes and more records?

John Ehrlichman and H. R. (Bob) Haldeman come to mind. Mr. Nixon must wish to shield these former employees because he must count on them to shield him.

In any event, it is obvious that sometime between Aug. 15, when he last boasted of the appointment of a special prosecutor, and last week, when he fired him, the President learned something about what Cox was doing which frightened or angered him and which made it seem imperative to get rid of him, at no matter what cost.

The cost is enormous. It includes the departure of Richardson and Ruckelshaus, regarded here as two of the very few Nixon employees with backbones of their own. It includes making a fool of constitutional lawyer Charles Wright and his arguments about executive privilege. It includes making the President look weak in principal, foolish in judgment and dishonest in commitment. It includes forcing the American people to the embarrassing suspicion that for months their President, as he has mouthed a high-flown rhetoric about executive privilege, may in fact, like Spiro Agnew before him, have been using the rhetoric as a screen to hide misdeeds.

The worst of it is that it's not over. Too many facts have been uncovered; too many lies have been told; too many shocks have been suffered for any presidential speech to clear the air.

There will be demands for another prosecutor; the lawyers for the Senate Watergate committee are already learning something of what the special prosecutor's lawyers know; there are a lot of questions still unanswered and there will be revelations.

Los Angeles Times