

Nixon on Speer... Ehrlichman's Lawyers Disagree

One apparent sign of the heavy pressures on President Nixon came, to the astonishment of administration officials, at a high-level energy crisis meeting in the Cabinet Room just before Christmas when Mr. Nixon glowingly referred to Hitler Germany's seasonal war production techniques during World War II.

Turning to energy adviser William Simon, the President said he wanted Simon to cut corners, demolish red tape and ride roughshod over the bureaucracy to get his energy program moving.

He then advised his audience to read Albert Speer's "Inside the Third Reich," particularly the description of how Speer, as arms production boss, had kept German war production at peak levels even during the worst of the Allied bombing of Germany. Some present felt the President was saying, in effect: I want Bill Simon to be my Albert Speer.

The reaction of some of those listening bordered on shock. Worse than that, some of the President's official family felt that the easy praise for convicted war criminal Speer's industrial mobilization war slightly ominous. An enduring rule in American poli-

tics has long stigmatized praise for any aspect of Hitler Germany in American political rhetoric. The fact that Mr. Nixon could so easily, and without self-consciousness, break that rule in the bosom of his official family was chilling. It was also indicative of the tremendous strain Mr. Nixon is now operating under.

A footnote: In a far different political lapse in late November the President made an extraordinary mistake. Signing the Alaska pipeline bill, the President said the first pen should go "to the senior senator from Alaska, Mike Gravel." Democrat Gravel's colleague, Republican Ted Stevens, the senior senator from Alaska, was visibly upset but managed to retrieve the first pen from an embarrassed President. It was the kind of mistake rarely made by a President who prides himself on being master of political minutia.

The question whether John D. Ehrlichman enters into serious plea bargaining with the Watergate Special Prosecutor is complicated by a severe backstage disagreement between his east and west coast lawyers.

Contrary to speculation, the suggestion that Ehrlichman tell all in re-

turn for limited prosecution came not from Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski but from Ehrlichman's Los Angeles attorney, liberal Democrat Joseph Ball. But his Washington attorney, conservative Republican John J. Wilson, for now is opposed to copying a plea.

Ehrlichman's course may determine the fate not only of his close friend and former fellow Nixon lieutenant, H. R. Haldeman, but of President Nixon. The Haldeman-Ehrlichman joint defense consists of flatly denying any wrongdoing. Ignoring advice from many aides, Mr. Nixon has tied himself to the Haldeman-Ehrlichman defense. Thus, should Ehrlichman begin talking freely to the prosecutors in return for a one-count guilty plea, Haldeman and the President might be adversely affected.

This again raises the point brought up at last summer's Senate Watergate hearings and angrily refuted by the tart-tongued, 72-year-old Wilson: Does Wilson representing both Haldeman and Ehrlichman as well as serving as an adviser to Mr. Nixon constitute a potential conflict of interests?

Ehrlichman was called to Washington Jan. 10 in another attempt by

Jaworski to extract hard information. Ehrlichman was accompanied only by lawyer Ball at a conference with prosecutors that morning when Ball unexpectedly began exploring the possibilities of plea bargaining.

Bail may face a difficult time in defending Ehrlichman against a perjury indictment returned by a local grand jury in Los Angeles in connection with the White House "plumbers" burglary of the office of psychiatrist Lewis Fielding. Egil Krogh, an Ehrlichman deputy who led the plumbers, avoided a similar perjury case in Los Angeles when he took a one-count federal guilty plea in Washington.

But when Ehrlichman returned to face the prosecutors after the lunch break Jan. 10, Wilson accompanied him and showed no interest in plea bargaining.

Even if Ehrlichman gets his lawyers together on a common path, Jaworski's demands will be tough: A guilty plea to a major charge and, more significant, assurances that the new evidence given by Ehrlichman will be sufficiently important.