

The President and The Grand Jury



— Jack Anderson

PRESIDENT NIXON'S "guilty behavior" convinced the Watergate grand jurors last summer that he was implicated in the Watergate cover-up, according to informed sources.

Most damning was his action after hearing the evidence against his three closest advisers — H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and John Mitchell.

The case against the trio was laid out for the President on April 15 by then-Attorney General Richard Kleindienst and Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen. They presented most of the evidence which has now become the basis for the grand jury indictments. Our sources say Petersen also warned the President that it looked as if Haldeman and Ehrlichman had directed a criminal cover-up.

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PETERSEN advised the President to fire Haldeman and Ehrlichman but urged him not to fire his counsel, John Dean. Petersen explained that Dean was cooperating with the prosecutors.

The President set out, apparently, to do exactly the opposite. On April 16, he huddled with Haldeman and Ehrlichman. Out of this came the decision to fire not the pair Petersen had suspected of running the cover-up, but the counsel who was helping the prosecutors make their case.

The grand jurors believe that the President tried to thwart Dean, who presumably was cooperating with the prosecutors

in the hope of getting immunity for himself. For on April 17, the President issued a Watergate announcement declaring:

"I have expressed to the appropriate authorities my view that no individual holding, in the past or at present, a position of major importance in the Administration should be given immunity from prosecution."

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MEANWHILE, he asked Petersen for more specifics about Dean's confessions and other information gathered by the prosecutors. He resisted the pressure to remove Haldeman and Ehrlichman until April 30 when he finally felt compelled to accept their resignations.

After they left the White House, he met with their lawyer and permitted Haldeman to monitor the controversial White House tapes that had been denied to the courts.

The sealed grand jury evidence, according to our sources, also implicates the President in an alleged conspiracy to buy the silence of the Watergate defendants. Their demands for money were discussed at a March 29 meeting in the President's office.

Haldeman agreed under oath that the President had said raising \$1 million was no problem. But Haldeman insisted that the President had added: "That would be wrong." The grand jury, which had access to the White House tapes of the meeting, charged that Haldeman had lied about this.