

Ehrlichman Denies He Is Cool to Nixon

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
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John D. Ehrlichman publicly pledged today his allegiance to President Nixon and the Administration in an attempt, sources close to Mr. Ehrlichman said, to put an end to repeated speculation about his loyalty in the face of at least three pending criminal trials.

"I do not believe the true facts justify the attacks on him," Mr. Ehrlichman said of the President. "I am confident that history will indicate him and his Administration as it has so many others in American public life in the past."

Mr. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's former chief adviser for domestic affairs, issued a statement from Seattle, where he now lives, in response to an article published today in The Los Angeles Times quoting his friends and neighbors as saying that he had been privately critical of the President. The article further said that Mr. Ehrlichman had told friends that Mr. Nixon's effectiveness as a President had ended.

Kenneth Reich, the reporter who wrote the article, said his newspaper was standing by it. "We had good reason to print this story," he said. "John Ehrlichman was given an opportunity to respond to it before it appeared, and he declined to do so."

Later, Mr. Ehrlichman personally telephoned the 800-word statement to The New York Times.

The statement not only denied most of the assertions published by The Los Angeles Times but also was clearly aimed at quashing what Mr. Ehrlichman previously depicted as unfounded reports and rumors that he was considering plea-bargaining or becoming a state's witness in future trials.

Mr. Ehrlichman, now a Seattle lawyer, has been indicated by the special Watergate prosecutor for his alleged role in the Watergate cover-up and for the burglary of the office of Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist in Los Angeles. In addition, Mr. Ehrlichman faces California charges of perjury in connection with that State's inquiry into the burglary.

Mr. Ehrlichman is known to have engaged in serious plea-bargaining with Federal prosecutors early this year, but he eventually turned down an offer that would have called for him to plead guilty to at least one felony charge.

The Los Angeles Times's dispatch quoted a person close to Mr. Ehrlichman as saying emphatically that he believed Mr. Ehrlichman would now plead guilty to a reduced charge. The article did not say whether the proposed charge would be a felony or misdemeanor.

In his statement, Mr. Ehrlichman said the report was "false because I am not guilty of any of the charges leveled against me and I intend to prove my innocence." He also depicted as "silly and untrue" the Los Angeles Times's report that he was angry at H. R. Haldeman, the former White House chief of staff, for not telling him about the President's decision to tape-record conversations in the Oval Office and other Presidential offices.

As for President Nixon, Mr. Ehrlichman said he was "optimistic that he will come out of all of this with regained effectiveness." He added:

"I think his [President Nixon's] domestic record has been as excellent as his record in foreign affairs. What he can accomplish in the future will depend on how he weathers the current attacks."

In what amounted to the only confirmation of any aspect of The Los Angeles Times's article, Mr. Ehrlichman acknowledged that he had expressed criticism of some of the "tactical responses" by the White House to various articles in the last year. Such criticism, he added, "was nothing more than a private citizen engaging in that national pastime of kicking the White House staff."

Press Chided

In a similar vein, Mr. Ehrlichman chided the press for its reporting of the many civil suits filed against him in the last year.

"In one, I was charged with liability in the sterilization of two girls in a Southern state by two county health officials," he said. "In another, the Socialist Workers party alleged I had responsibility for an explosion in their headquarters."

In other specific denials, Mr. Ehrlichman disputed The Los Angeles Times's report that he resigned from his White House post last April 30 after reaching an understanding that Mr. Nixon would follow up the resignation with a complete statement about Watergate and his handling of it.

"At no time did I request nor did he agree to make disclosures," Mr. Ehrlichman said. "By the time I left I felt that he had, in fact, made a full disclosure of what he knew about Watergate."

Mr. Ehrlichman also denied The Los Angeles Times's report that he had told friends that he believed an 18½-minute gap on a June 20, 1972, White House tape recording was deliberately caused. "I have no way of knowing what caused any gaps," he said.