

A Blunt President, Behind the Scenes

NYTimes

MAY 1 1974

By LINDA CHARLTON
WASHINGTON, April 30—“Blemishes and all,” President Nixon said, and he warned of ambiguities, embarrassments and brutal candor in the 1,308 pages that provided today perhaps the closest look outsiders have ever had of a President in private—and certainly of the private Richard Milhous Nixon.

If the “blemishes” that Mr. Nixon warned of meant the sort of language that many use in unguarded conversation but few feel at ease with in public, most of them have been excised. Whatever the words and phrases were, they are now “characterization deleted” or “expletive omitted.”

But the promised candor seems to be there in Mr.

Nixon's blunt and unflattering appraisals even of members of his own Administration, his own White House staff.

L. Patrick Gray 3d, the onetime acting director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, was described in these terms by Mr. Nixon in an Oval Office conversation with John W. Dean 3d and John D. Ehrlichman:

“He is just quite stubborn and also he isn't very smart.”

At another time, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee, a Republican member of the Senate Watergate Committee, is dismissed as “a smoothy—impressive.” Of the late Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Mr. Nixon said in a discussion of the use of bugging, “Bobby was a ruthless (characterization omitted).”

But the true candor lies not in these harsh assessments. It lies, rather in the indefinable tone and flavor of these conversations in which Mr. Nixon becomes “P” for “President” and others are, similarly, identified by an initial in the margin: “D” is Mr. Dean, “M” is former Attorney General John N. Mitchell, “K” is former Attorney General Richard G. Kleindienst, “H” is H. R. Halderman and so on.

Except for relatively rare conversations with an outsider such as Assistant Attorney General Henry E. Petersen, these are tactical discussions among people

Continued on Page 39, Column 2

ATTENTION MASOCHISTS:
THE ANNUAL WBAI MARATHON
Starts tonight at 7:30 p.m. with
“Pacifica is 25” Anniversary Documentary.
Listener-Sponsored WBAI 99.5 FM—ADVT.

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

whose common outlook and goals are understood among themselves. Only rarely does the President look beyond the confines of the political moment as when he spent more than 30 minutes in a late-night telephone conversation with Mr. Ehrlichman last April.

“My feeling frankly is this,” Mr. Nixon said. “That you know I was just thinking tonight as I was making up my notes for this little talk, you know, what the hell, it is a little melodramatic, but it is totally true that what happens in this office in these next four years will probably determine whether there is a chance, and it's never been done, that you could have some sort of an uneasy peace for the next 25 years.”

Mr. Ehrlichman, the transcript records, replied, “Uh huh.”

The President went on: “And that's my—whatever legacy we have, hell, it isn't going to be in getting a cess-pool for Winnetka, it is going to be there.”

Humor Is Scarce

But such philosophical comments are the exception. Mostly, the principals are talking about who and how and what and, sometimes, why, and what can be done, what will happen if. No one, as far as the flat, badly punctuated sentences show, was other than businesslike; anger was kept within bounds. Humor was scarce, and it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a remark was meant lightly or not.

Once in a conversation with Mr. Halderman, Mr. Dean spoke of the possibility of subpoenas being served “at home somewhere.”

“They can always find you,” he said.

“We move to Camp David and hide!” replied Mr. Halderman. “They can't get in there.”

There is no recorded (laughter), only the exclamation mark to indicate that, perhaps, Mr. Halderman was having his little joke.

But (laughter), recorded following an exchange of remarks about Mr. Gray, which ends with Mr. Dean remarking, “Maybe someone will shoot him.”

Not that Mr. Nixon was not jocular, sometimes, and often friendly, opening conversations with “Hi!” and once telling Mr. Mitchell, on the phone, “O.K., John, good night. Get a good night's sleep. And don't bug anybody without asking me. O.K.?”

Mr. Nixon, as he emerges from these transcripts, has little tolerance for those he regards as fools. Of Donald H. Segretti, he said: “Expletive deleted). He was such a dumb figure, I don't see how our boys could have gone for him. But, nevertheless, they did. It was really juvenile. What in the (characterization deleted) did he do?”

And later, he scoffs at what he calls “the Segretti crap.”

Sometimes, however, he expressed compassion, as when Mr. Ehrlichman described Herbert L. Porter, an aide at the Committee for the Re-election of the Presi-



Associated Press

Newsman waiting for copies of tape transcripts at White House press office yesterday

dent who pleaded guilty to lying to the F.B.I., as “a little fish who got caught in the net.”

The president added, “Poor son of a bitch. It's wrong. It's wrong.”

'Nobody Is a Friend'

But more often he is the isolated man. “Nobody is a friend of ours,” he said. “Let's face it. Don't worry about that sort of thing.”

Only occasionally does any sense of place intrude into the pages, as when a secretary or a servant enters the room.

STEWARD: Yes, sir?

P: “I will have some consommé.”

Or the transcript will show a sentence dwindling into nothing, when the note “(dishes or walking around.)”

Throughout, Mr. Nixon is always aware of himself as the President, often, as he does in his television speeches and reportedly in Cabinet meetings, referring to him-

seeking always to define the legal risks. "Perjury," he told Mr. Dean, "is an awful hard rap to prove." Later, in the same conversation, he described his lawyer, Herbert W. Kalmbach, as having problems that are "politically embarrassing, but no criminal." He said, "There is no illegality in having a surplus in cash after a campaign."

There is talk of "scenarios" and "viable options," and there is Mr. Ehrlichman's final disposition of some proposal: "I don't think it sells, though." And there is an occasional refreshing change of pace as when a relative outsider, such as Mr. Petersen, enters to say such things as "I think I would probably go to Saudi Arabia" when Mr. Nixon asks him what he would do if he were Mr. Mitchell.

Money is never a problem. Mr. Nixon repeats again and again that the finding of a "million dollars to take care of the jackasses who are in jail" could be "arranged." And, early on, he says to Mr. Dean:

"We are all in it together. This is a war. We take a few shots, and it will be over. We will give them a few shots, and it will be over. Don't worry. I wouldn't want to be on the other side right now. Would you?"

self in the third person. With this sense of office there apparently goes an assumption of power, an assurance that all the agencies of the Government are his to use, as when he asks whether someone needs anything—unspecified—from the Internal Revenue Service.

But he is also the lawyer,