

# Scrubbing the Big Enchilada,

By Russell Baker

After editing the Watergate tapes to its own satisfaction, the White House now says they prove that John Dean cannot be believed. The trouble with this is that if John Dean had done the editing we would probably have an edition proving the White House cannot be believed.

This, of course, would also be unfair. If edited evidence is going to be used to prove a case, then all the parties who might be damaged—and not just the White House, not just Dean—should have equal editing rights.

Mitchell, Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, Hunt, Magruder, Strachan—the whole bunch, all of whom are damaged in various ways by the White House edition, should be given a chance to go over the tapes and edit them according to what they believe Congress needs to know in order to have all the evidence.

We can only guess what various men

would omit. Would Ehrlichman, for example, elect to write in "(unintelligible)" when transcribing the passage in which he calls John Mitchell "the big enchilada" who, if thrown to the wolves, might satisfy appetites for a large-size victim and take the pressure off the White House?

An enchilada, according to the Random House Dictionary, is "a tortilla rolled and filled with a highly seasoned mixture, usually containing meat, and covered with a sauce flavored with chili." Ehrlichman might conceivably believe Mitchell would be needlessly offended to learn that he was discussed at the White House as succulent cuisine, and edit it out.

Mitchell, in the same spirit, might find it equally discreet to substitute "(unintelligible)" for those passages in which the President tells Haldeman and Ehrlichman that Mitchell "hates" William P. Rogers, the former Secretary of State.

And what about Dean? There is

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that passage in which the President tells him to compile a list of people they can "get," people who "have been asking for it" and who are now "going to get it," since the President has finally decided to use his power against them. "What an exciting prospect!" is Dean's reply. Surely Dean would like to edit that embarrassing piece of boyish sycophancy down to an "(unintelligible)."

Fair is fair. If the White House is to have the right to edit, then so should everybody else. Otherwise, justice will not be served.

One immediate advantage to the public will be a vast reduction in the amount of transcript it must wade through to obtain what the President calls all information necessary to reach a judgment.

With just the White House edition, which we now have, the public faces

## and (Unintelligible)

at least six months of almost continuous reading. However, after each of the men involved had edited the thing to his own taste, it would probably shrink down to a document of no more than a few hundred words.

It would probably read somewhat as follows:

P. Oh, hello. Sit down. (unintelligible).

E. That's right. (unintelligible) was just a messenger.

H. No, he wasn't at the (unintelligible).

P. Watergate?

E. (unintelligible) when he talked to me.

P. I can't (unintelligible) Mitchell and (unintelligible) told Bob, "Look, we've got to (unintelligible)."

H. Every time we meet on this there seems to be a brass band playing on the White House lawn.

(Deletion of material not related to Presidential action.)

E. (unintelligible).

H. Colson thought (unintelligible) and phoned (unintelligible) and said (unintelligible).

P. Incredible. (Expletive deleted).

H. (unintelligible).

(White House steward enters).

P. I will have some consomme, steward.

E. Me too.

(Deletion of material not related to Presidential action).

E. I wonder if (unintelligible) we ought to (unintelligible) on this since (unintelligible).

P. How's that?

H. What's wrong in the White House kitchen? This consomme is always (unintelligible).

This version edited by everybody would make it much easier for Congress and the courts to determine that nobody had done anything wrong. The present version edited by the White House offers such absolution only to the President, quite naturally.