

Nixon-Haldeman Closeness Described

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The House Judiciary Committee yesterday heard a former aide describe President Nixon as so concerned with detail and so close to his former chief of staff, H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, that some members felt invited to infer that if Haldeman knew of or was involved in the Watergate cover-up, Mr. Nixon also knew and wished it so.

Haldeman was to have been a witness next week, but committee chairman Peter W. Rodino Jr. (D-N.J.) said last night Haldeman will not be called because his lawyer stated that Haldeman, who is under indictment on charges of being

involved in the cover-up, would not testify.

The President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair, had hoped that Haldeman could help clear the President of alleged involvement in the cover-up by testifying that Haldeman did not pass on a message from the President that hush money should be paid to Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt Jr.

The first live witness at the impeachment inquiry was Alexander P. Butterfield, who, during Mr. Nixon's first four years in the White House, had responsibility for administration and security, supervised the taping of presidential conversations and, according to his testimony to the Senate Watergate committee, was "in

charge of the smooth running of the President's day."

During a day of testimony, Butterfield, now head of the Federal Aviation Administration, detailed the staff organization of the White House, its pecking order and the access of staff to the President, down to showing by chart where staff members were physically located. He testified in closed session, as will all other witnesses in six more days of testimony.

What emerged, according to several members, was the picture of President Nixon in firm control of the White House, involving himself even in small details. Closest to him, as has been generally believed, was Haldeman, with the rest of the staff well behind.

"It sounded as though Haldeman was the alter ego of the President," one Democrat said. "There was total control by Haldeman of everything that happened around the President. It appeared that Haldeman never did anything without the knowledge of the President or the belief that he wanted it done."

"I judge," said Rep. Robert McClory (R-ILL.), second-ranking committee Republican, "That Butterfield was brought up here to show that the President operated through Haldeman and that Haldeman's acts should be attributed to the President."

John W. Dean III, then White House counsel, testified before the Senate Watergate

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committee that Haldeman knew of the Watergate cover-up. Haldeman denied it in sworn testimony. He has since been indicted on charges that he was involved in the cover-up, and is to stand trial with six other defendants in September.

Rep. Charles Wiggins (R-Calif.), a defender of the President, observed, however, that while Butterfield could testify as to the normal operation of the White House, he didn't know what happened at certain meetings or what Haldeman told the President.

"There is no evidence that the President knew what Haldeman knew," Wiggins said. "That is a conclusion. It is an unreasonable inference that whatever Haldeman knew the President knew."

Most observers feel that if the committee recommends impeachment, the likeliest charge would be that the President knew of the cover-up and took part in obstructing justice by failing to take prompt and open action to stop it.

Much of the testimony will focus on the events of March 21, 1973, when the President said Dean first told him of the payment of hush money to the Watergate burglars. That evening, \$75,000 was allegedly paid to Hunt.

It went almost unobserved that the President failed to comply with four committee subpoenas ordering him to turn over 49 tapes of White House conversations by 10 a.m. yesterday.

The committee hoped the tapes would shed light on dairy industry contributions, the International Telephone and Telegraph Corp. antitrust case, domestic surveillance and alleged misuse of the Internal Revenue Service to punish political enemies. These are also being investigated as possible grounds for impeachment.

St. Clair advised the committee that the subpoenas could not be discussed with Mr. Nixon until he returns from Moscow. The President's only response to eight subpoenas for a total of 147 tapes has

been to the first, when he released edited transcripts instead of the 42 taped conversations requested.

The committee has made no attempt to enforce its subpoenas, but has told the President that members may infer from his noncompliance that he has something to hide, and even make it separate grounds for impeachment.

During St. Clair's questioning, he asked Butterfield if he believed the President would do anything to "discredit the office." After a lengthy committee wrangle over whether this was a proper question, Butterfield was permitted to answer and said: "Logically, no."

Committee Republicans have divided into informal task forces to specialize on the complicated details of the Watergate story. Their purpose is to be prepared to discuss intelligently when the committee begins debating the issue in two weeks.

Rep. Hamilton Fish (R-N.Y.) said the impression he got of Mr. Nixon from Butterfield's testimony was that the President is "a man of enormous attention to detail, a man whose relaxation and recreation was work."

At the same time, Fish said, the President's contacts were limited. "Mr. Haldeman was the one who saw him the most," usually several times a day and often for hours on end.

As a consequence, Fish said he found it "highly plausible" that the President might not have talked to Dean for lengthy periods. Haldeman, by contrast, had immediate access, Fish said.

Asked whether it was likely, in light of Mr. Nixon's attention to detail, that he would not have known of the Watergate cover-up for almost a year, Fish said: "It's plausible that Haldeman didn't tell him. That's the big question mark in the whole thing."

Fish declined, however, to say whether it was plausible to think that the President didn't at least ask Haldeman about Watergate. He said he wasn't prepared to make that judgment.