



H. R. Haldeman Diaries Collection, January 18, 1969 – April 30, 1973

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Friday, May 8.

The big press conference - with an awful lot at stake as the tension mounts in the nation. Media have built it up very big, and it really is. An awful lot of schools closed, a lot of rhetoric, a major threat of violence, etc. President spent the day at Camp David working on the briefing book. Called down several times regarding specific questions and logistics. Came down in time for dinner and to dress, then went right to East Room - back upstairs afterward. Had said absolutely no phone calls after (because he was really concerned and unsure about this one), but changed that afterwards when he knew he had done extremely well. Then he stayed up until after 1:00 on the calls, and we ran a batch through. He was very tired and rambled on a lot.

All through the day the advice poured in from all sources, as everyone feared the President would either be too belligerent and non-understanding of the dissenters, or would be too forgiving and thus lose strength and Presidential leadership. All depends on your point of view. I gave all the pertinent advice on both sides to the President - the hard line was mainly from Kissinger who feels we should just let the students tear it for a couple of weeks with no effort at pacification, then hit them hard. Most of the others leaned the other way and wanted a full apology for the "bums" and a tight muzzle on Agnew's rhetoric. Fortunately President was shrewd enough to accomplish both objectives without giving in on either.

Whole press conference was masterful. He really zinged the bad guys by promoting ABC, the *Star*, etc., and worked in all the points he wanted to make. Even got a great laugh out of turning the Hickel letter thing around - and zinged Wally pretty good at the same time. The aftermath on the White House staff was a mood of great relief and almost exhilaration. My crew stayed until about 12:30 handling calls - then left. President called several times after I was home, last at about 2:00.

In trying to leave we were jammed in by the troop trucks unloading the Third Army into the EOB. A very strange feeling as the White House and DC batten down for another siege. The buses were being lined up, police all over, etc.