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A Double-Standard of Forgiveness?

Tom Braden's column "Imperial Presidents" and the CIA" (Post, Feb. 3) was almost an excellent piece. What made it commendable was that it professed the idea that a man (Richard Helms) could follow the instructions of the Commander in Chief, in the firm belief that in so doing he was serving his country in a proud calling, and despite the fact that subsequent political

Mr. Evans, a Washington attorney, served as an assistant director of the Domestic Council in the Nixon administration.

judgment says he was wrong, he should still be considered an honorable and honored man.

What makes the Braden article bad is that he subscribes to an offensive double standard as to who should be forgiven. Instead of talking about the imperial presidency and its effect on patriotic and loyal subservents, he is talking about rotten Richard Nixon. Lyndon Johnson, the latterday Louis XIV, could adopt a "L'Etat C'est Moi" attitude, and Braden suggests we view LBJ's abuse of power as simply a lowly mischievous mannerism because Johnson was "large, powerful and domineering." Richard Nixon on the

other hand was "sly, stealthy, plotting and sneaky." For Mr. Braden, it is not so much that a President abuses the power and trust of his office. The crime is a lack of style.

Richard Helms is cool, poised, unflappable. He is bright, savvy and is long on experience in the government. He would be, if he is not already, a perfect model, for the steady, level-headed, logical and honorable public servant in an Allen Drury epic about Washington intrigue. Yet Mr. Braden would have us believe that this man, who had been head on head with more than one President, could not stand up and say, "That is wrong, Mr. President. If you insist, my only course is to resign." The truth of the matter is that Mr. Braden is right. It would have been virtually inconceivable for Helms to rebuff the President. But it isn't because Richard Helms was trained to be Agent 007 with a spy's knee-jerk, march-off-the-diff reaction to any instructions from the head man. It is because even the most knowledgeable and experienced government officials like Helms, do not go around hastily dipping out their resignations on every issue where they do not have instant agreement with the President. Because 99 out of 100 times, the President is going to be right, or, at least not overruled.

Richard Helms should not be in-

dicted, or tried, or scorned. He is an able public servant deserving of honor. We should profit from his experience in confronting the imperial presidency, and we should not chastise him for having been in the lists. But I ask Mr.

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Braden, where was he for the others? Why does the virtue of this defense crystallize only when his friend is tied to the stake? Why did he not perceive the righteousness of serving one's country when 31-year-old Bud Krogh was summoned into the Oval Office and charged in the name of national security to stop the leaks that were killing our boys in Vietnam? Should young Krogh have said, "I would resign before I would take on an assignment like that, Mr. President. Any schoolboy knows you can't stop leaks under the guise of national security, no matter how many Americans are being killed.

We staff guys have chatted about that very question several times in the year that I have been in government. What surprises me is that after over 30 years in government and as a student of the presidency, you don't know any better." If Richard Helms, after 20-odd years negotiating the shifting sands of the bureaucracy, wouldn't stand nose to nose to the President, who could ex-

pect Bud Krogh to do fit? And when they stuffed a piece of paper under the nose of 32-year-old Ed Morgan and said, "Sign this for the President. It has all been checked out, and he'll know what a good job you have done," does anyone really expect that he should have said, "Forget it?"

The problem is that if the press, to the man, didn't hate Richard Nixon, at least he had no friends in the press. Apparently the "operative" rule at the Press Club was that if you wouldn't befriend Richard Nixon, you wouldn't befriend any of those able young men who had the temerity to "serve their country" under him.

Richard Helms is Tom Braden's friend. I read in the paper that Braden gave a party the other night to reassure Mr. Helms, during moist-eyed speeches, that the friendship ran strong and true. Mr. Braden's article was a further tribute to that friendship. That article appeared before any official action has been taken against Mr. Helms in the sincere hopes that such potential action will be deterred, and a good and long career will not be disrupted or degraded. Mr. Braden's point was timely and well-taken. For Mr. Helms' sake I hope it is believed. The tragedy is that Mr. Braden and his brethren had neither the time nor the inclination to make friends with Bud Krogh and Ed Morgan.