

Making It 'Perfectly Clear'

Mayday file

By DAVID LAWRENCE

WASHINGTON — Small wonder that President Nixon doesn't have news conferences on television very often. Questions are put to him sometimes that tend to create wrong impressions in the minds of millions of listeners.

Tuesday night, for instance, Mr. Nixon was asked if he thought that keeping the government running was so important that some method "such as suspending constitutional rights" was justified. The reference, of course, was to the mass arrests in the "M a y d a y Demonstrations." The President replied:

"I think when you talk about suspending constitutional rights that this is really an exaggeration of what was done. What we were talking about here basically was a situation where masses of individuals did attempt to block traffic, did attempt to stop the government. They said in advance that is what they were going to do. They tried it and they had to be stopped. They were stopped without injuries of any significance. They were stopped. I think, with a

minimum amount of force and with a great deal of patience. And I must say that I think the police showed a great deal more concern for their rights than they (the demonstrators) showed for the rights of the people of Washington."

Another questioner asked whether, since the courts have dropped charges against so many of the persons arrested, the President felt the police had properly handled the situation. He answered that he did think so and pointed out that the police were confronted by those who contended they were demonstrators but actually were law breakers. In fact, Jerry V. Wilson, chief of police in Washington, in an interview in the May 24 issue of "U.S. News & World Report," explained exactly what had happened. He said:

"This demonstration was carefully structured by the organizers of the Mayday demonstration to strike at the weak points of our criminal-justice system. If you read their tactical manual, you can see that.

"They anticipated that we wouldn't be able, for example, to arrest their participants blocking traffic on May 3 because of the

normally cumbersome processes for making arrests in the field. They knew our field-arrest processes, described them in their tactical manual. They knew the capacity of our prisoner-holding facilities, anticipated that we would not be able to make sufficient arrests to control the situation. Because of this, we had to tailor our response to the plans for this particular demonstration....

"In this type of thing, I think the only recourse the government had was to make mass arrests."

Chief Wilson pointed out that on May 10 the Senate had adopted a resolution highly commending the actions of the police. He said that there have always been complaints after mass arrests are made.

President Nixon declared that he approves fully what was done by the police and that, in the event that similar situations arise in the future, he hopes they can be dealt with as well as the one in May was handled. He firmly asserted:

"When people come in and slice tires, when they block traffic, when they make a trash bin out of Georgetown and other areas of the city, and when they terrorize innocent bystanders, they are not demonstrators. They are vandals and hoodlums and law breakers and they should be treated as law breakers."

"Now, as far as the police were concerned, they gave those who were in this particular area, and who were engaging in these activities, approximately 15,000 in all, an opportunity to disperse. They did not. They said they were there to stop the government from operating.

"I have pledged to keep this government going. I approve the action of the police in what they did. I supported it after they did it. And in the event that others come in, not to demonstrate for peace but to break the peace, the police will be supported by the President and by the Attorney General in stopping that kind of activity."

So far as the persons who were arrested are concerned, they were present in areas where disturbances were going on and which the police ordered to be cleared. They were taken into custody when they did not leave. That some of them might be released was anticipated. The government presumably was well aware that the arrest itself would be a lesson for the future to those who had paid no heed to the warnings of the police.