

Disbelief Voiced In City on Coast

By STEVEN V. ROBERTS

Special to The New York Times

CONCORD, Calif., Aug. 16 — "He didn't explain himself, he didn't come out with what the people wanted to hear," Alma Ward said this morning, as she put some carrots into a plastic shopping bag. "He's still trying to hide the one thing the people wanted to hear—the truth, what really happened."

"He didn't open up enough," agreed her husband, Harold, a retired automobile salesman. "But I think the reason he didn't open up is that he has something to hide."

Around the glistening shopping centers of this suburban community east of San Francisco Bay, the Wards were expressing the dominant reaction to President Nixon's latest speech on Watergate. The President said last night that he was telling the American people the "simple truth." Today many of the people here said they simply did not believe him.

Some accept the President's Account that he did not know about the Watergate cover-up and consistently tried to find out the true facts. And many responded to his appeal to forget the scandal and "get on with the urgent business of our nation."

Sympathetic View

"I'm with him," said Carl Iverson, a buyer for a supermarket chain. "I'm sick of Watergate, I wish we could get back to running the government."

But the Watergate issue will not go away. A few weeks ago, a correspondent of The New York Times visited Concord as part of a national report on the impact of Watergate, and the survey showed that even many people who had voted for Mr. Nixon were losing confidence in his leadership.

Last night, the President tried to restore that confidence, and Concord is a good place to gauge his success. With almost 100,000 residents—twice the size of only 10 years ago—it is typical of the fast-growing suburbs that more and more Americans call home.

Sun Valley Shopping Mall

has replaced Salvio Street as the community crossroads the newest large employer in town administers oil company credit cards. Contra Costa County is registered Democratic, but went heavily for Mr. Nixon last fall.

Confidence Not Regained

Yet dozens of interview today give one clear impression here: President Nixon largely failed to restore the confidence he has lost. Voters who had been part of the "new Republican majority" last fall are now saying their vote was a "big mistake." When they talk about the President these days, "liar" is one of the kinder words they use.

Mr. Nixon is clearly hoping that people are tired of Watergate, and John Davidson, the editor of The Concord Transcript, thinks they are. "They have kind of a funny attitude," he explained. "They might think that Nixon is not coming out with the facts, but they tend to agree that we should get on with something else."

A sizable group here just cannot believe that any President would lie to them; they believe Mr. Nixon because of the office he holds, not what he says. As Charles Calkins, an equipment mechanic for the gas company, put it:

"He said he had nothing to do with it, and I have to go along with him. I just believe it—because he said it."

Others agree with Dave Emery, a fire inspector, who thinks Mr. Nixon's explanation makes sense. The President "had an awful lot occu-



The New York Times/Aug. 16, 1973



The New York Times/Gary Haynes

Alma Ward commenting on President Nixon's speech in Concord, Calif. At left is her husband, Harold, who is a retired automobile salesman.

pying his mind," said Mr. Emery, and he "had to believe" what his aides were telling him about the scandal.

Many Nixon voters really liked him and do not have a large reservoir of good feeling, but his strongest backers have never lost heart.

Praise for Stamina

"I felt a little safer after his speech," observed Myrna Sullivan, the wife of an engineer and a staunch Republican. "He has the stamina a President really needs at this time and he's taken the right road. I was always confident that he would find a way of telling us exactly what happened, and I think he did."

But it was hard to find somebody in Concord who liked the speech and did not already support the President.

"I think it was a phony, just like his first speech," snapped an oil worker at the Sun Valley Mall. "It was a soft sell, it tried to lull the people and make them forget Watergate, and it didn't come off at all."

"He really didn't bring out anything specific about what he did or didn't do," said Sharyn Turner, a young nurse. "So many things are unresolved that he didn't mention."

"Once I'm convinced someone has lied to me, it's pretty hard to believe him again," admitted Helen Webster, an accountant.

Basis of Skepticism

This skepticism is rooted in two key issues. The first is that the President's story—that he did not know about the cover-up—just does not make sense to many people. As I. D. Sarao, an iron worker, put it; "I can't see how a man in his position failed to know what was going on."

The second is the President's refusal to release the tapes and records of White House conversations about Watergate, a refusal he reiterated last night.

"He's a quack, I wish I hadn't voted for him," fumed Fred Marcus, a car salesman.

Even some Nixon supporters disagree with him on the

tape issue. Willard Ranney, a dental technician, said he has confidence in the President, but thinks many others do not. "He doesn't have any definite proof other than his word," said Mr. Ranney sadly. "He needs proof that people can hear and see, something they can get a hold of, or there's going to be doubt there."

Some who are weary of Watergate blame the President, not the Senate investigators, for the delay, because Mr. Nixon is not "coming clean" with what he knows. And others resent the whole tone of his speech. As David Perez, a garbage collector, put it, "I won't forget about Watergate. If I was guilty, they wouldn't forget about me."

Frank Peais, a pipe fitter, did not bother to watch the speech. He was too cynical, he said, to believe the President anymore.

What could the President have said that he would have believed? Frank Peais laughed, and then he said, "I'm guilty."