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The latest "explanations" from the White House reveal that President Nixon still has no conception of the precarious realities of his position. A press secretary, releasing lengthy statements about Mr. Nixon's role in the I.T.T. antitrust case and the raising of price supports for the milk producers, asserts that these accounts "will lay to rest the allegations against the President." They do no such thing. Yet the White House seems to believe that, having voluntarily provided new versions of two unresolved controversies, nothing more need be said and the cases are closed.

The attitude revealed in the current White House entourage is but a continuation of the Haldeman-Ehrlichman era, the air of lofty detachment with which the political leadership communicated—if at all—with the American people. In those years it was falsely presumed to be the prerogative of the Oval Office to determine what it was that the public needed to know; it still seems to be the case. The piecemeal release of partial information, either to fuzz up past contradictions or to take the sting out of anticipated new disclosures, obscures more than it clarifies.

The fundamental flaw in these occasional voluntary statements is that they are incompatible with the situation in which Mr. Nixon actually finds himself. The President, as the head of his Administration, stands accused of a massive abuse of power. He is an executive who must answer for a long list of disastrous appointments of top-level aides who have either been charged with, or found guilty of, serious criminal offenses. He is known to have authorized illegal procedures, if not their application. Subordinates have confessed to acts of perjury and obstruction of justice. The dubious collection of vast campaign funds, and the subsequent storage and use of such funds in the form of hot cash, remains unresolved. Mr. Nixon's personal finances have not yet been satisfactorily explained.

When viewed against such an incomplete list of charges, any posture based on the assumption that it is still up to the White House to determine how much candor is enough is ludicrous. Mr. Nixon said last April: "In any organization the man at the top must bear the responsibility. That responsibility, therefore, belongs here in this office. I accept it."

He repeated that theme last November in his Disney World news conference, when he said: "I recognize that because of the mistakes that were made, and I take responsibility for those mistakes, whether in the campaign or in the course of an Administration, that there are those who wonder whether the Republic can survive."

The combination of the charges against him and his own acknowledgment of his responsibility should make it evident that it is simply no longer up to Mr. Nixon and his associates to determine just how much they need to tell. The President cannot pretend that he assumes responsibility for what has happened, then blandly go on acting as if he were not on trial before the judgment of the American people.