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Plain Facts About Watergate

It is time now to face some realities about the Watergate scandals.

Plain fact No. 1 is that President Nixon still has not satisfied and probably is never going to satisfy the great majority of Americans of the total innocence of his conduct. (This is quite aside from that minority who could not be convinced by any amount of evidence sworn to by a dozen archangels.)

Plain fact No. 2 is that this same great majority of Americans is opposed by about 4 to 1 to any effort to force the President's resignation, or his impeachment.

Plain fact No. 3 is that the Democratic Congress itself is overwhelmingly unwilling even to contemplate such steps in the dark anyhow, public opinion quite aside.

Plain fact No. 4 is that while the various offenses and grossnesses of former Nixon associates are exceedingly unpleasant or illegal or both, they do not really corrupt the whole political process. Nor are they totally unexamined nor unique except probably in degree and scope.

Nor do they threaten government itself unless we choose to make it so by

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an everlasting breast-beating and by sewing ourselves into a national hair shirt so tight that it may be impossible to remove it short of losing our very skins in the process.

Plain fact No. 5 is that while the President has again not answered many specific questions about Watergate, he has again proclaimed his own lack of guilty involvement, has accepted the ultimate responsibility in any case, and has promised not to let it happen again.

Put plain facts 1 through 5 together and there is much to be said for the President's appeal that we leave Watergate to the courts from now on out and get back to dealing with a whole series of grave national problems of a less melodramatic nature.

No doubt Mr. Nixon's recommendation has its self-serving side, but he is

by no means alone in believing that the Ervin committee's Senate investigation should now come to an end. Some, perhaps even most, of the committee's own members believe the same thing. And so do some others whose identities might surprise the reader.

There is, for illustration, the black and ultra-liberal Democratic Congressman from Michigan, John Conyers, who for one of the few times in his life expresses a majority rather than a minority view on Capitol Hill.

"They (the Ervin committee) have reached the maximum in terms of educational value to the nation," says Conyers, who could not possibly be described as a Nixon apologist. "We've been sufficiently shocked, stunned, terrorized and angered, and I think it's all down hill from here."

Indeed, the whole situation comes to this: no genuine force in either public or Congress is willing to seek the President's destruction and this being the case there is no point in preparing for him one of those lingering Chinese maybe-deaths of a thousand tiny cuts. By any sensible measure he must either be let up to go on with public work which on the whole he has done very well or he must be impeached. The latter alternative being wholly unreal, the former is the only one left.

As to the Senate investigation, its sole official mandate is to gather information as to any need for legislation against Watergates. In the first place it now has all the information it needs. In the second place everything illegal done in Watergate is unlawful already. In the third place a lot of Watergate was not illegal, but simply nasty, and that can't be legislated against anyhow.

As to the criminal aspects, a plethora of grand juries and a whole clutch of eager prosecutors, some with the stars of political ambition in their eyes, are already fully in the field. Let them get on with it.