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Mr. Nixon as the Target

By Patrick J. Buchanan

"... The reaction by journalists and politicians to the Watergate break-in has been morally even more corrupt than the Watergate activities themselves."

Chancellor W. Allen Wallis
University of Rochester, June 10, 1973

WASHINGTON—Chancellor Wallis' indictment is understated. The Watergate crowd cannot hold a candle to its principal accusers in politics and the press.

Berated morning, noon and night with Watergate, the nation has seen its important business put off, its economic interests and currency suffer in foreign markets, its reputation in the world diminished. There now appears no damage to United States interests that is unacceptable & no political principle they will not rise readily above—to sink their teeth in the President of the United States.

Since the gavel rang down on Army-McCarthy, the nation's dominant media has warned, ad nauseam, against the inevitable injury to rights and reputations inherent in the Congressional investigating committee, where no clear legislative purpose is being served. Eisenhower's refusal to allow his aides to testify before Senator McCarthy was received, therefore, as an act of statesmanship. Today, however, when the quarry is not domestic subversives or organized crime—but Richard Nixon and his men—the old caveats are forgotten in the frenzy of the case.

"Trial by headline," "built by association," and "Hearsay testimony," long the subject of scathing editorials, are now the source of daily headlines. In a questionable tribute to the power of the press, today, 36 per cent of the American people have become convinced the President had prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in, though not a single witness has so testified.

Nor is one surprised to learn that the publications beating the drums for immediate public disclosure of the most sensitive papers and conversations of the President are one and the same with the publications in the vanguard demanding an absolute shield law to protect in perpetuity the confidentiality of their reporters' notes.

So much excellent scholarship has already been produced on the double standard of the liberal establishment, the exercise becomes as redundant as one more essay on Hamlet.

Let us suppose, nevertheless, that brothers Liddy & Hunt had done their breaking and entering on behalf of the

antiwar movement. Had Judge "Maximum John" Sirica then handed down his draconian sentences—20 and 35 years respectively for first-offense burglary—to pressure the pair to betray confederates and superiors—would this trampling upon the spirit of the Eighth Amendment have been so loudly and universally applauded?

Poor Liddy & Hunt. If only, like Ellsberg, they had dropped their stolen papers off at the national desk of The New York Times, instead of the campaign desk of Jeb Magruder, they might be sharing the Pulitzer Prize.

In the catalogue of crimes against civil rights, how grievous is Watergate? We know of course that in the temple of American liberalism, off the main altar, there stand the marble likenesses of Franklin Roosevelt and Earl Warren. Yet, three decades ago, thanks to this pair, 110,000 Japanese-Americans were stripped of savings and property and hauled off to concentration camps. Alongside this atrocity against civil liberties, how really serious was Hunt's bag job on Ellsberg's analyst, or Liddy's rummaging through O'Brien's mail?

And, despite the cheers and applause of the yahoos assembled in the caucus room, how seriously can one take the "extremist humbug"—in a Richmond paper's phrase—of Senator Sam's teary-eyed declaration that Watergate is worse than the Civil War in which half a million Americans lost their lives?

Indeed, what is there in Watergate that is without precedent in the Democratic administrations and campaigns

of the recent past? Wiretapping electronic surveillance?

But it was under Attorney General Robert Kennedy, not John Mitchell, that the F.B.I. taps went on the phones of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and the Democratic National Committee was not the first target of a political tap. Adlai Stevenson was bugged at the Democratic convention in 1960. Barry Goldwater was the subject of a full-court press in 1964. N.B.C. bugged the 1968 Democratic convention. And in the fall of that year, Mrs. Anna Chennault was the subject of a "national security" wiretap, the products of which were turned over to Democratic nominee Hubert Humphrey, for use at his discretion.

Dirty tricks?

When the Nixon and Goldwater campaigns of the early sixties were be-

devised with phony press releases, bolted schedules and trains chugging out of the station before time, this was laughed off as the work of the "merry prankster, Dick Tuck." When, however, there arrived at a 1972 Muskie fund-raiser 200 steaming pizzas, a giant floral wreath, two magicians all the way from Charlotte Amalie and a dozen Middle Eastern and African ambassadors in rented limousines, suddenly this becomes "political sabotage," meriting Congressional investigations and screaming headlines.

What of "political spies"? Are they a CREEP innovation? Hardly. When a newsman weaseled his way into the confidence of the Nixon campaign, transcribing conversations, filching memoranda, the fruit of his deceptions, "The Selling of the President, was hailed as a centerpiece of the new journalism by publications that now affect horror at "political espionage" against Hubert Humphrey. The parties who lionized Joe McGinnis would terminate with extreme prejudice the Sedan Chair brothers.

Theodore H. White reminds us that, back in 1964, Mr. Ehrlichman's predecessor, White House counsel Myer Feldman, headed up a "five o'clock club," that had in hand Barry Goldwater's speeches well before their scheduled release. Whence came these documents? "Don't ask," White House aide John Roche was told on inquiry.

What of the charge with which Michigan Congressman Brown has been pilloried in testimony—the alleged Congressional cover-up of a campaign scandal? What the Congressman did was vote against a partisan investigation of Watergate by the Patman Committee—following the established precedent of Senators Talmadge, Inouye and Ervin, who voted, each of them, seven times in 1964 to restrict a Congressional investigation into the shenanigans of L.B.J. protégé Bobby Baker.

The foregoing is not to excuse or condone or justify the misdeeds of Watergate but to place them in perspective. It is to suggest to the President's friends that the President's adversaries have not marshaled all these troops and all this artillery simply to "get at the truth about Watergate."

They are after larger game. What the left has in mind is not just running to ground their adversary of a quarter century but strangling in its infancy the President's new majority, rendering "inoperative" the political verdict of 1972, and reimposing upon the

nation the politics, policies and programs repudiated in a million voting booths in November.

With all due respect to the senior Senator from Tennessee, the ultimate question of Watergate is not, "What did the President know and when did he first know it?" The ultimate question is not legal. It is not judicial. It is political: whether the democratic verdict of the American people in November of 1972 will be allowed to stand, or whether it will be overturned by a defeated minority—with Watergate as their weapon.

As Godfrey Sperling of The Christian Science Monitor perceived two months ago:

"Watergate has become the last best hope for liberals who are convinced that the President is leading a counter-

revolution. Much of the zeal behind the Watergate probe is led by liberal critics who want to break the President in order to blunt Mr. Nixon's conservative thrust . . . the President's critics are really quite desperate. They are literally fighting for their political lives. . . ."

As has been argued by spokesmen of both the Republican party and the conservative movement, political and social, neither bear any culpability whatever for Watergate. Both, however, have a vital stake in the outcome.

One trusts that with the future of a sympathetic Administration, and the interests of the conservative movement in the balance, we will not see validated Whittaker Chambers' harsh verdict that the central shortcoming of conservatives is the failure to retrieve their wounded.

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