

An Appeal For Fairness

SECOND OF A SERIES

"I stated in very specific terms—and I state again to every one of you listening tonight these facts—I had no prior knowledge of the Watergate break-in! I neither took part in nor knew about any of the subsequent cover-up activities . . . that was and is the simple truth."

After twelve weeks and two million words of televised testimony we have reached a point at which a continued backward-looking obsession with Watergate is causing this Nation to neglect matters of far greater

importance to all of the American people. We must not stay so mired in Watergate that we fail to respond to challenges of surpassing importance to America and the world. We can not let an obsession with the past destroy our hopes for the future.

I ask for your support in getting on once again with meeting your problems, improving your life and building your future.

With your help, with God's help, we will achieve these great goals for America."

Richard M. Nixon
President of the United States
speaking to the nation on Wednesday, August 16, 1973.

For nearly two and a half months, the nation has been buffeted by the charges and counter-charges emanating from the hearings of the Watergate Committee. Hearsay and innuendo raised to the level of "evidence," trial by a biased press wallowing in scandal, wild accusations by senators protected from libel actions by their privileged status, the groundless, yet pervasive, presumption of the President's guilt—all this and more have combined to make the Watergate hearings the sorriest public spectacle since the McCarthy investigations of the early fifties. Indeed, the parallels between the two sets of hearings are striking.

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

Now as then *guilt by association* is a key weapon used to condemn those who can be discredited in no other way.

"If you are innocent," Senator McCarthy once thundered at a cowed witness, "then why do you have on your office payroll a known subversive?" The response by the witness that he was unaware of his employee's activities made little impression on McCarthy. Guilt by association had been established.

Today, filling in for McCarthy we have Senator Lowell Weicker. His interrogation of former Presidential aide H. R. Haldeman included this amazing outburst:

Senator Weicker: "In light of your statement that the President emphasized the qualities of integrity, intelligence and initiative (in choosing his staff) I've seen so many young people come before this Committee in their capacities with the Committee to Re-elect the President—so many shattered lives—I ask you, who set the example for what happened?"

The answer Senator Weicker was attempting to plant in the minds of listeners was that Richard Nixon had set the example; that he is in some bizarre way guilty of whatever misdeeds may have been committed by any member of the vast White House staff; that his corrupting influence created a situation in the White House where, in Weicker's colorful rhetoric, "everything that was touched was corroded."

Such an allegation strikes a new low even in the shoddy history of *guilt by association*. Unable, after twelve weeks of hearings, to demonstrate that the President was aware of the cover-up, Weicker asks us to condemn Mr. Nixon EVEN IF HE WAS TOTALLY UNAWARE OF IT, because, we are asked to conclude, the President "set the example" for the entire White House staff! FOR WEICKER, MR. NIXON IS, SO TO SPEAK, GUILTY EVEN IF HE IS INNOCENT!

BY WHAT RULES OF FAIRNESS AND DECENCY CAN A PRESIDENT—OR ANY MAN—BE CONDEMNED IN SUCH A MANNER?

And we might also ask: Where are the protests from the press at this blatant use of guilt by association which they so vociferously denounced during the McCarthy years? IS THIS FAIR?

TRIAL BY INNUENDO

Trial by innuendo has also been a prominent feature of the hearings. Senator Daniel Inouye interrogated Haldeman on August 1 regarding the private tapes President Nixon asked him to listen to in early July:

Senator Inouye: "Is it possible that in pressing the buttons (on the tape recorder) you might have ACCIDENTALLY erased portions of the tape?"

Audience: Whispers and knowing intakes of breath.

Haldeman: "I can assure you that I did not make any effort to erase or alter the tapes."

Senator Inouye did not respond. He didn't have to. He had planted the seed, or rather, he was cultivating

the seed he had planted the day before. On July 31, Senator Inouye had stated: "This is the question that the people are asking: is it possible that these tapes could have been altered?"

But are "the people" asking this question? If by "the people" Inouye means the biased press, then he is correct. The allegation that Haldeman had doctored the tapes had already been made by columnists distinguished by their readiness to blame the President for every misfortune from the weather to the "Weathermen." In their fevered imaginations, no act is so dastardly that Richard Nixon would not commit it. And now they had found a United States Senator more than willing to repeat their most groundless and outrageous charges.

This is clearly an effort to discredit the tapes in advance. If they are eventually produced and do not prove the President's "guilt," this will only "prove" that THEY HAVE BEEN DOCTORED. EITHER WAY, WHETHER HE PRODUCES THE TAPES OR NOT, MR. NIXON CANNOT WIN.

Here we have an example of how the press and the Committee work in tandem to achieve a mutually desired result. The press PLANTS the allegation (totally unfounded, of course), a Committee member QUOTES it during the hearings the next morning, and that evening, the press REPORTS that Senator Inouye stated that "the people" believe the tapes might have been doctored. Thus, a groundless rumor—deliberately PLANTED by the press and fostered by the Committee—becomes instant "fact." FAIRNESS? DECENCY? NOT BY ANY STANDARD FAMILIAR TO AMERICANS.

INFLAMING THE ATMOSPHERE

In such an atmosphere of bias and prejudice, it is no wonder that GRAND INQUISITOR Ervin received wild applause from the caucus room clique for his absurd statement that "Watergate is a greater tragedy than the Civil War!" This kind of overblown rhetoric is calculated to inflame passions and destroy whatever is left of the American people's sense of balance and proportion. What is happening to our country when a Senator can make such a statement and still be praised in the press for his "balance," "statesmanship," and, amazing as it may sound, "non-partisan fairness"?

In fact, the Ervin hearings have become the most partisan spectacle in recent memory. As has been pointed out by Pat Buchanan (New York Times op-ed page of August 2), little or nothing in the Watergate scandal is new. Acts of campaign bugging and sabotage are shoddy and regrettable, but they have been part of every recent Presidential contest. What makes Watergate different is that it is the supporters of RICHARD NIXON who were caught at it. It is plain that the press is out to destroy the President not because of anything he has done in regard to Watergate, but because of who he is. The Ervin Committee has been more than willing to help the press carry out its vendetta.

THE TIDE IS TURNING

But despite the best efforts of the self-appointed senatorial prosecutors, we do not believe our fellow citizens have been entirely stampeded into sharing the Senators' presumption of the President's guilt.

MR. HALDEMAN PUT IT WELL; THE QUESTION IS NOT, AS DEAN SAID, "HOW COULD THE PRESIDENT NOT HAVE KNOWN ABOUT THE COVER-UP," BUT RATHER, "HOW COULD THE PRESIDENT HAVE KNOWN?" SINCE NOBODY, INCLUDING DEAN, CLAIMS TO HAVE TOLD MR. NIXON ANYTHING ABOUT THE COVER-UP UNTIL MARCH OF THIS YEAR, HOW INDEED COULD HE HAVE LEARNED WHAT WAS HAPPENING?

It is revealing that the same Senators who claim that Mr. Nixon must have known about all the doings both of his staff and of his Re-election Committee nodded in silent assent when former CIA director Helms came before them displaying a very limited knowledge of the specific doings of his agency's employees. If Helms, a universally respected and highly competent public servant, found it impossible to keep track of the daily activities of the employees of one government agency, how, in the name of fairness, can the Senators expect the President, carrying on his shoulders the burdens of the world, to be aware of the comings and goings of the White House staff as well as the tremendous number of Re-election Committee employees?

As if sensing the public's weariness with the Watergate syndrome, the Congress and the press have thrown themselves into a frenzied effort to discredit the President in other areas. A blinding barrage of charges designed to overwhelm the people and create a vague but persistent over-all sense of guilt has been let fly in Mr. Nixon's direction. For pure hypocrisy and venom the attack is without precedent.

Those who decried the lax security measures which enabled an assassin to cut down John Kennedy now denounce Richard Nixon for "allowing" the Secret Service to spend public funds on security features at the western White House.

And, with a mind-boggling dishonesty, those who have called long and loud for East-West trade now attack Mr. Nixon for the U.S.-Soviet wheat agreement, the most important and hopeful economic exchange between our countries in decades.

But answering these charges and the many more which pour daily from the media is like trying to catch snowflakes in a blizzard. And that, of course, is the whole idea. Inundate the people with a blinding number and variety of charges—no matter how unfounded each one may be—and the sheer volume will make a verdict of "guilty" inevitable.

But there is evidence that the people are becoming suspicious of the strategy and motives of the press.

SENATOR ERVIN'S PANEL NOTWITHSTANDING, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ARE, WE BELIEVE, BEGINNING TO ECHO MR. HALDEMAN'S QUESTION: "HOW COULD THE PRESIDENT POSSIBLY HAVE KNOWN?"

The overwhelming response to our first message in this newspaper indicates that the tide is turning against the sowers of fear and mistrust. Your generous help enabled us to reprint that first message in newspapers across the nation. We ask you to help us keep the momentum of truth from slowing down. Those who are determined to destroy the President seem to care little that the very fabric of our country may be torn apart in the process.

WE, THE PEOPLE, must demonstrate to the world that we have not panicked, that we have not allowed Watergate to destroy our sense of balance and proportion, and most importantly, that when our President carries out the vital foreign and domestic duties of his high office—as he has continued to do throughout this crisis—he does so with the support and confidence of the nation behind him. We have grown from a committee of eighteen to over five thousand nationally within two weeks. Give us the tools and together we will do the job.

LET US HEAR FROM YOU. THIS IS THE TIME FOR FAIR-MINDED AMERICANS TO SPEAK OUT IN DEFENSE OF THE PRINCIPLES WHICH HAVE BUILT AND SUSTAINED OUR FREE SOCIETY.

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