

Nixon's Watergate announcements of p.m. 4/17/73

Where I have erred in figuring Nixon has more often been in not really understanding how completely unprincipled, how thoroughly bad a person, he really is. Today's announcement, in the making of which he seemed completely unembarrassed, are in point.

Once it was clear that he was firmly hooked and that all the evil would come out, he made a new pretense, that it is he who is bringing it all-his description- out. Not pressures he could not control, not the judge or grand jury, not, of course the Senate committee. He made an investigation. I think he didn't even say he caused one to be made. He called it "my investigation".

In a sense I did anticipate this greatest of all arrogances, but not its magnitude. I did conceive him presenting himself as St George in a world of dragons. But that he would pretend to have done all that he had done what he could to prevent I never dreamed.

It also seems clear from this short press conference, which was not that but his delivery of statements that could not be questioned, that he seems to have this need to consider himself something. Being President seems not enough. There was a time when I considered he had quite an ego. But as he exposed himself more and more, it seemed rather like a lack of ego and that he did what was required to make him think well of himself. In a sense that he could think well of himself because others had every reason (as he saw it) to think well of him. Thus he has to appear to be right and successful. He did not shame to pretend that he had prevailed on the phoney question of so-called executive privilege when he did not. There is no reason to believe that the Senate backed down on anything or extended any special favors or considerations. He presented it entirely differently. There had been these delicate negotiations and his view had been accepted, so he prevailed, he won, he was right, he did something, something that should be considered good.

He said nothing in saying that if any of his were indicted, they'd be suspended pending trial, fired if convicted. This would have been what happened in any case. It is not some special dispensation from him, no special gesture toward law and order, no sign of respect for the law or its processes. It is what he could not under any circumstances avoid. Under similar circumstances on the past, he has led the pack in demanding ousting and immediate firing after unsubstantiated charges only.

Everyone in the Congress and the press, all informed people, know this is a monstrous pose, yet that does not deter him. There is no vestige of self respect, no trace of regard for the concern of the decent or of simple decency. He is not ashamed that everyone knows he is so ignoble, so dishonest.

There was no time for "instant analysis", so the shows I heard and taped (NPR, NBC ~~Evening~~ News, CBS Evening News, which was longest) presented none. The two most obvious objects of sacrifice now seem to be Dean and Haldeman. As long as Hunt was silent, Haldeman could have been protected. Maybe not against McCord, but probably the hearsay pretense would have been tried. Once Hunt started to talk, there was no chance of shielding Haldeman, I think now.

He seems to date "his" investigation at the time of McCord's letter. What else he could have learned for the first time then is not immediately apparent.

But if "he" had to make one, what was Dean doing for him, what was the FBI doing?

What I think has taken this four weeks is arranging or trying to arrange fixes and deals and awaiting the propitious moment. Once his ego needs were satisfied vis a vis the Senate, his chief need was to beat anyone else. The Senate has not been leaking. McCord has been. The closest thing on which I can think there is a basis for timing and the seeming rush of the unscheduled announcements is the leaking of the grand jury transcripts to Jack Anderson. He quotes them directly, not in paraphrase, first in his yesterday's column.

So, John the Mitch was called down, he told Martha to sound off, somebody leaked to first the ^{Chi}Trib and then the LATimes, and the new game was started. It is my hunch that by now John has everyone so terrified of Martha that he'll come out o.k., for she has made clear that she can say things and there can be no doubt of her disposition, generally and in the specific case most of all. His out will be that he, familiar as he was with FBI reports, never dreamed the sources of the information of which he had this casual knowledge while he was so busy with so many more important things. HW 4/17/73