

A Long Way to Go on Watergate

For a full year Mr. Nixon and his men managed "Watergate" with such consummate skill that the administration nearly got off unscathed. So it is not enough for the President merely to say that he wants to get the truth now. It is not even enough for him merely to let justice take its course.

Mr. Nixon needs to go beyond investigation of crime to a confrontation with the moral standards of the men around him.

Suspicions are in order because the administration organized in the very first hours last June a truly concerted effort to pass off the Watergate break-in as a trivial, slightly comic affair. White House Press Secretary Ziegler called it a "third-rate burglary."

That stance was maintained even when it became known that one of those apprehended in the break-in was James McCord, the security man at the Committee for the Re-Election of the President. McCord was then working full time for the committee.

But the top man at the committee, former Attorney General John Mitchell, identified McCord in an exquisite piece of lawyer's prose as though he were some remote private dick, a million miles below the level of the presidential campaign. According to Mr. Mitchell, McCord was "the proprietor of a private security agency who was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security system. He has, as we understand it, a number of business clients and interests, and we have no knowledge of these relationships."

Thanks to not a little White House disparagement of those trying to get at the truth, that cock-and-bull story of total divorce between Watergate and the administration led a charmed life. Indeed, the fiction ran an amazing gamut. It survived attack by George McGovern, whose charges were ascribed by White House spokesmen to partisan politics. It survived a federal investigation by the Justice Department. It survived the steady expose stories of The Washington Post which was accused by Mr. Ziegler of "shabby journalism."

In the end, one unlikely figure forced out the truth. Federal judge John Sirica did not believe what the witnesses told him in the trial of "The Watergate Seven." The judge said so publicly and repeatedly. He arranged the sentencing to force the defendants to talk. Eventually McCord broke.

The McCord break cast a dark shadow over the original investigation by John Dean III, counsel to the President. The more so as L. Patrick Gray III, the President's nominee to head

the FBI, acknowledged that Dean had probably lied to the bureau.

Suddenly Republicans across the country began pressing the White House for the full truth. Their pressure armed a Senate inquiry into Watergate led by Sen. Sam Ervin.

Still the administration hung tough. Mr. Nixon had issued a statement on executive privilege shaped to deny the Senate committee the right to examine

his present or former aides. Attorney General Richard Kleindienst, less than a week ago, reasserted that strong position. And behind the screen of these statements there were backstage maneuvers with the committee to go easy on certain aides. Only when the Ervin committee rejected these maneuvers was the stage set for Mr. Nixon's announcement on Tuesday.

Characteristically, the President gave almost no ground. It is not exactly a big deal to say that officials indicted for a crime would be suspended and, if convicted, fired. But Mr. Nixon did say just enough more.

He says he discovered new evidence, presumably in an investigation by Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen of the charge that Dean lied to the FBI. He says the new evidence con-

vinced him that "Watergate" was more serious than he supposed. So he directed White House officials to testify to the Senate committee with only minor restrictions.

Most of the country will probably sigh with relief at Mr. Nixon's action. The story that he wants to force out the truth will probably be widely accepted.

This is as it should be. The country has only one President. But those who have followed this affair closely will want further evidence of the President's change of heart. That evidence can only come if Mr. Nixon moves beyond the Petersen investigation to a hard look at all of his political associates, past and present.