

The Trouble That Hounds Mr. Nixon

The President's latest press conference provides a new measure of his Watergate troubles. But not because of physical signs, such as pouring sweat or misspeaking, which intrigue people who haven't bothered to follow the case.

The trouble that plagued Mr. Nixon in the press conference is the trouble which has hounded him ever since Watergate got going. The central fact—the fact underlined anew in the press conference—is that a mass of evidence points to Mr. Nixon's involvement in the vast array of crimes lumped under the general rubric of Watergate.

Take, first, the one piece of genuine news which emerged from the conference—the news that the Watergate grand jury had sought to question Mr. Nixon personally. The President tried to pass that off as a mere bagatelle. "It's a matter of record," he said.

In a pig's eye. Actually Mr. Nixon's statement at the press conference was the first public acknowledgement that the grand jury had asked him to testify. That fact is of fundamental importance. It was not Sen. Sam Ervin's Watergate committee which wanted Mr. Nixon to testify; nor the special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski; nor the press, nor any of the others whom Mr. Nixon is pleased to regard as his enemies.

The request for his testimony came from a jury of ordinary Americans. It can only mean they had reason to believe that Mr. Nixon was privy to important information about crimes connected with Watergate. That suspicion has to be quickened even more since Mr. Nixon did not respond to the grand jury request as he easily could have. Instead he refused on what he calls "constitutional grounds."

Then there is the little matter of the plea entered by Herbert Kalmbach, the President's attorney, to illicit campaign fund-raising. The lawyer Mr. Nixon chose to handle his intimate personal business joined at least a score of other former close associates of the President in admitting guilt to activities related to Watergate.

Among other things, Kalmbach acknowledged that he accepted a campaign contribution of \$100,000 from J. Fife Symington, a Maryland socialite, in return for a promise of appointment to an embassy in a European country. When the embassy was not forthcoming, Kalmbach offered to return the money.

At his press conference, Mr. Nixon denied knowing of the Symington affair, and said that "ambassadorships have not been for sale" in his administration. But somebody authorized Kalmbach to receive money from Symington, and then to offer repayment. That somebody is soon going to be named in a criminal indictment. He is going to turn out to be somebody who has been very close to Mr. Nixon. And there will be a fresh piece of circumstantial evidence pointing to Mr. Nixon's complicity in criminal actions.

As a final example, consider the matter of the tax deduction of \$576,000 taken by Mr. Nixon for the gift of his vice-presidential papers. Everything Mr. Nixon said in his press conference confirms the impression that he deeded the papers after the legal deadline and would have to pay back taxes of several hundred thousand dollars.

Mr. Nixon, however, likened what he had done to similar actions by notable Democrats, including President Johnson and Profs. J. K. Galbraith and Jerome Wiesner. But it turns out that President Johnson refused the deduction of several million dollars, while Prof. Galbraith deducted less than \$5,000, and Prof. Wiesner made an outright gift without any deduction.

The point of all this detail is that what counts is not how Mr. Nixon looks or sounds on television. What matters is his role in a number of specific, criminal cases. Ugly little facts pointing to his involvement keep coming out. Had he been a Mafia associate, he would have been long since tried and convicted and jailed just on the basis of the circumstantial evidence.

Because he is the President, everybody is reluctant to believe the worst. But as the evidence keeps mounting,

as the guilty pleas of his former associates add up, as the indictments of his most intimate co-workers are handed down, as his own excuses wear thinner and thinner, it becomes harder and harder to believe that Mr. Nixon is innocent. It thus becomes more and more likely that he will be made to pay for his actions in the impeachment proceeding which the Constitution prescribes.

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