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What Kind Of Moral Fiber?

By TOM WICKER

The press role of Richard Nixon is being measured by the amount of moral fiber he has shown in the debate over wiretapping for individual suspects.

What kind of moral fiber does it take for a man in the White House office of the President to order the services of the Federal Bureau of Investigation committee which has been saving time and money by wiretapping?

And what kind of moral fiber and accountability is it for Mr. Nixon and all his lieutenants to have no responsibility or knowledge about a meticulously planned and fully financed campaign of political skulduggery against the Democrats when sworn affidavits and medical files are said to be available and ready to show that the funds primarily were kept in the office of Walter Stans, Mr. Nixon's one-time Secretary of Commerce and now the chief fund-raiser, and that a White House contact man for the ring of social satirists and provocateurs was Dwight Chapin, the President's own appointment secretary?

These charges have not been proven in court, but the evidence is mounting so rapidly and so massively that it is simply not good enough for the President of the United States and his

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top aides blandly to deny any responsibility or knowledge, as if they had no responsibility, either, for the good name of the Government or to refute the impression of official lawlessness and lack of scruple that is being created.

Particularly because the investigation of the matter is under the political control of his own Justice Department, Mr. Nixon ought at least to suspend Mr. Chapin without prejudice until the matter is cleared up to public satisfaction. Can anyone doubt what Mr. Nixon himself would have said of the situation that now exists, back in his days of lambasting the Truman Administration for "Communism, corruption and appeasement?" Or if Mr. Truman's press secretary had said, as Mr. Nixon's has, that he would not "dignify" serious charges

And when such a cloud of suspicion is hanging over his own office, it behooves Mr. Nixon to take to the radio to preach the falsehoods that he is more against crime than the Democrats, that he has done something effective to stop crime in his four years in office and that his is an Administration that promotes "the moral and legal values" of the nation. Only if wiretapping and bugging political opponents, without benefit of court order or any other valid authorization, have either a moral or legal value and this Administration claim to have as much for either one and the Supreme Court, including the President's own appointees, ordered his Justice Department spies to stop doing so.

The Justice Department's own statistics about its wiretapping activities are even more damning than anything that could be said by the press.

Justice Department statistics by the numbers in the White House are in fact more damning than any statistics that could be said by the press. The number of wiretaps in the first three years of his administration was 1,000. In the last three months of that period, the number of wiretaps was 1,112. The number of wiretaps per day in the last three months of that period was 37.

Mr. Nixon said again in the White House that he had been told by the Justice Department that wiretapping for drug cases was being done. He said that he had seen his own statistics to show that there were 1,112 wiretaps in the last three months of 1970. He said that he had seen the more important part of the information of the Justice Department has been extensively documented.

Mr. Nixon warned his first aides calling for tough new sentences for drug pushers. But James Woodbury of the Harvard Law School, the former Chairman of the National Crime Commission and now Mr. Nixon's chief adviser on crime, and others have pointed out that Mr. Nixon has provided no Federal resources for drug addicts who voluntarily seek out methadone and other treatment programs by the thousands; that despite the fact that he is the first President to have at his disposal the half-billion dollars a year provided for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration by a Democratic Congress at the instigation of the same Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson and his Attorney General Ramsey Clark.

Mr. Nixon also repeated his falacious claim that by appointing "strict constructionists" to the bench he has provided more law and order. He did not point out that Mr. Justice Rehnquist's contribution had been to become the first Supreme Court Justice in history who had to write a defense of his participation in a case in which he had a clear prior interest.