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Helen Gahagan Douglas: Anger Without Malice

By Henry Mitchell

"He is my President, too," said Helen Gahagan Douglas at a luncheon yesterday, waiting a second for her audience to marvel at the lack of bitterness in the statement.

Of course, as this former California Congresswoman who was defeated in a U.S. Senate race by Richard M. Nixon in 1950 made clear, the man, in her opinion, should be impeached.

She said in her address to the Woman's National Democratic Club, that President Nixon's "high crimes and misdemeanors" include the "secret war" in Southeast Asia, his failure to control those close to him who committed illegal acts, and his abuse of "national security" as an excuse to bypass constitutional restraints.

The largest crowd ever to attend a speaker's luncheon at the club was estimated at

525 and was made possible by taking out all the lunch tables. Democratic liberals have often maintained that Helen Douglas' defeat in this McCarthy-era race was the direct result of Nixon tactics to find bogus issues, to impugn the integrity of the opponent and so forth. Thus the Democratic ladies were not about to miss Mrs. Douglas' appearance, now that the Nixon administration is somewhat at bay.

"They told me in 1950, when I voted against the McCarran Act, that I couldn't get around the state of California fast enough to answer the things the Nixon supporters would say. They said 'He'll beat your brains in.' I said 'that's not my concern; what is important is to figure out what's right and do it.' And I said it's difficult enough to figure out what's right—I can't also figure out what's smart."

With an austerity that fits these troubled times and (as they would put it) the greatness the nation is in, the Democratic women and their guests dined off on cheese sandwiches, two pale tomato wedges, a canned peach half, a chemical brownie and coffee, all off cardboard plates.) They balanced all this on their laps, dropping colored photos of grandchildren, stepping on each other's toes, as they settled, and generally building up to a fine moral anger.

"All of what we now call Watergate was carried out for national security," Mrs. Douglas said. "National security is a heavy smog over the nation today, it oozes under the door..."

"She is an orator, I tell you. An orator," said a woman to a friend in the audience in a low voice.

She referred to the House

See DOUGLAS, B3, Col. 6



Helen Cahagan Douglas with Cathy Douglas, wife of Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas and Frank Manheinicz yesterday at the Woman's National Democratic Club.

By James K. W. Aberton—The Washington Post

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DOUGLAS, From B1

of Representatives as "that weak spineless body" but went on to say that when the House Judiciary Committee convenes to consider impeachment, "I don't see how they can escape it."

In a more general sweep she asked larger questions about where the nation is going:

"Have 200 years worn out the dream?" she said, her hands quavering a little but her body bristling with energy at the age of 73. She is the wife of actor Melvyn Douglas and was herself a well-known actress.

"We have been very silent, and it's time we moved if we are to save the government," she said, because all the "Watergate" irregularities are "in the last analysis and in the first analysis an attack upon us, the people."

From time to time the audience clapped.

Mrs. Douglas said after lunch it is not a question of Nixon "it could be John Brown—the question is whether the President, whoever he is, can operate outside the Constitution."

As for Vice President Gerald Ford, Mrs. Douglas said he was approved because "it is believed he is an honest man. Period."

"I think a lot about Diogenes," she said, alluding to the Greek philosopher who carried a lantern in the daytime searching for an honest man.

But nobody need think Nixon alone bears responsibility, the tenor of Mrs. Douglas' remarks contined, because each citizen can play a part in correcting the nation's woes.

"The young man who investigates everything — yes, Nader. Nader shows what one man can do."

And there are problems of

fuel, pollution, close to home. One of the worst things Mrs. Douglas can think of is detergents polluting the nation's waters.

"There's always Fels-Naphtha," she said sternly

but seemingly without malice, "and Ivory soap and a little elbow grease."

Judging by the applause all the Democrats in town are now hard at it with their scrub boards.



By James K. W. Atherton—The Washington Post

Helen Gahagan Douglas: "National security is a heavy smog over the nation today, it oozes under the door . . ."