

11 September 1974

Dear Harold:

This responds to your 9/9 memo on the Nixon pardon, and has the advantage of two more days in which to accumulate hindsight. However, our first impressions remain strongest, that Ford's dominant emotion during the announcement Sunday morning stemmed more from urgency -- an ill-concealed necessity to get it out -- than from obvious discomfort and embarrassment.

We happened to turn on the radio when he was a few sentences into his announcement and immediately both got a clear message that he felt forced for some reason. Later, we caught TV replays which only strengthened this impression.

We agree with you and Joe Alsop that now is the best time in terms of obvious political costs to make such an announcement, but still have the feeling that something else very powerful was at work. By the time of his announcement, Ford knew that ~~ber~~Horst was getting out, and there is an apparently well-authenticated story, not yet denied as far as we can tell, that ALL of Ford's top advisors were unanimously against the pardon. He also knew that. Yet he went ahead and made the announcement, burning his bridges behind him, on a Sunday morning in such a crude fashion, as you point out, that callers on local talk shows quickly likened it to Pearl Harbor and called it a sneak attack against the American people. We monitored the few talk shows available much of Sunday and Monday too, and the fury only grew. NO callers approved as far as we could hear.

I think your idea of a deal dating from the time Nixon offered Ford the VPcy has a good 50-50 chance of being correct. Against it I have to balance our strong impression that Ford appeared, in all obvious ways, forced. Nixon blackmail suggested itself as the obvious answer, and one has to presume that among the keepsakes our GL took with him was enough dirt on all conceivable candidates to blackmail any of them at any time. I don't know precisely what he could have on Ford, but you have enough yourself to make him look pretty silly during a presidential campaign.

Something that strengthened our impression of a blackmail operation was the curious reports which had been emanating from San Clemente since roughly the first of the month regarding our GL's health, mental state and withdrawn mood, all buttressed by odd bits about Sanchez, the valet, doing the shopping at Alpha Beta (a miserable supermarket, worse than Safeway) with his wife doing the cooking as leaves collected on the front lawn until the local Boy Scouts had to be called in to clean things up. One way of looking at this is to think of it as a fairly subtle gambit, possibly using Haldeman advice, to scare hell out of Ford by suggesting that if GL should go off his rocker there could be no telling what he might say.

Since the pardon came through, presumably on schedule on Sunday, (and with GL characteristically giving nothing in return by way of the desired statement of contrition or admission of wrongdoing), GL has been able to go to Palm Springs to the Annenberg pleasure dome and has recovered enough for Bob Finch and Herb Klein, the two main sources of the illness leaking job, to begin rowing back and poohpoohing any suggestion of mental trouble. Today, as if to contribute an element of credibility to the whole charade, an unidentified member of the family is supposed to have revived GL's fleebus to the extent that he is in some pain and is, in spite of the pardon, down and depressed.

Listening to this and other news tonight, it occurred to us that Nixon is not yet satisfied, that from his standpoint Ford has not yet delivered in full. He's supposed to pardon Haldeman and all the others too, which would account for Hushen's flat statement ~~Monday, late Monday~~ late Monday that Ford was considering pardons for all. Unfortunately this generated a firestorm of protest which forced Buchen and others today to deny the whole thing and say that Ford was merely going to deal with each case on an individual basis. Whether it was in the original deal or not, Nixon now seems to be ~~insisting~~ demanding pardons for his chief honchos, at least, as well as himself. Nixon may have no choice, of course. Another thing that convinces us that Nixon was forcing Ford -- and probably with some kind of a time limit associated with 30 days after his resignation -- is the way Ford bungled the whole deal with Nixon, giving up everything and getting nothing in return, committing himself irrevocably before he had a single concession from Nixon wrapped up. LBJ may have been right about Ford having played football too long without a helmet, but after 25 years in the House I don't see how the village idiot could have allowed himself to be outmaneuvered to the extent that appears to have happened. Nixon really appears to have had him by the balls and to have dictated to him in no uncertain terms.

One thing, of course, that might explain Ford's urgency would be knowledge that the WG grand jury was about to blow with ~~some~~ some sort of statement to the effect that although it could not indict effectively it could give the people the facts in a presentment report, and that Ford knew this from Jaworski, that Jaworski may have told him he could not prevent this getting out, pardon or no pardon. Lacovera's resignation could be a straw in this particular wind. But on the whole we have felt, thus far, anyway, that Ford was too unstrung Sunday, too obviously unhappy to reflect anything but a painfully personal pressure which he could do nothing else about. Be interested to see to what extent, if any, your impressions agree. At this distance it is difficult to trust one's early judgments too strongly.

Twice I have read through your memos on the phone call and subsequent visitor you mentioned. I can conclude only that he's still on the job and may have got in touch to get a personal impression of what has given rise to WWIV and what sort of a problem it really is going to pose. On the basis of my reading, I can come up with nothing else as strong as that impression.*

A few accumulated things enclosed which may come in handy.

Best,



jdw

* Nothing in your memos contradicts such an assumption, while they contain a number of things suggesting a consistent effort to establish confidence and credibility.