

Capitol Punishment

Mixing the Spirit of '76 With 1984

6/15/73 By Art Buchwald

In just a few days, on June 17, the United States will celebrate the first anniversary of the breaking in of the Watergate. A group of patriotic citizens under the leadership of a friend of mine, Julian Stein, are urging President Nixon to declare it a national holiday.

He told me, "The one thing England has that we don't is Guy Fawkes day. For more than 365 years the British have indulged in all sorts of shenanigans in memory of the man who tried to blow up Parliament in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. Among other things, they burn Guy Fawkes in effigy, make huge bonfires and set off firecrackers. In further commemoration of the Plot, a formal and ritualistic search of the vaults beneath the Houses of Parliament is made each year at the opening of their sessions.

"We think that June 17 should be duly celebrated in this country as 'Watergate Day.'"

"It sounds great," I said. "What would people do to observe it?"

"On 'Watergate Day' Americans would memorialize this historic event by taping other people's doors, tapping telephones, spying on their neighbors, using aliases, wearing red wigs and making inoperative statements."

"You mean people could lie to each other?" I asked.

"Of course. Parents would not have to tell the truth to their children, bosses would not have to level with their employees, and husbands would be permitted to make up stories to tell their wives."

"June 17 would be like April Fool's Day," I said.

"It would be much wilder. Anyone breaking into a doctor's office would be granted immunity. People could raise money for phony causes, and only cash

would be accepted as legal tender."

"Would you have parades?" I asked Mr. Stein.

"You bet you would. You would have plumbers' parades all over the country, honoring the plumbers in the White House who were supposed to turn off all the leaks.

"In Washington the President would review CIA and FBI bands as they marched down Pennsylvania Avenue leading the loyal members of the Committee for the Re-election of the President.

"In the afternoon the President would lay a wreath at the Watergate complex just under the window of the former headquarters of the Democratic National Committee."

"That would be nice," I said.

"In the evening there would be a fireworks display in every town to remind us all of the fireworks the Watergate has caused in this country."

"I get chills just thinking about it," I admitted.

"If the President declares June 17 a national holiday you could have 'Watergate Day' sales in the department stores with giant savings on burglary tools, shredding machines and lie detectors. And grand juries would only have to work a half day."

"Of course," added Mr. Stein, "the churches would remain open for people who wanted to pray for their country."

"I don't see anything wrong with it," I said. "There's only one question. In England on Guy Fawkes day they burn Guy Fawkes in effigy. Who would Americans burn in effigy on 'Watergate Day?'"

"We may have to wait until June 17, 1974, before we figure that one out."