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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Tapes, the Transcripts and the President

As a physicist involved in the problem of the technical examination of the White House tapes, I write to suggest a different type of compromise between the House Judiciary Committee and the White House.

There are several points to consider. First the human ear is totally inadequate for the detection of tampering. To have Congressmen Rodino and Hutchinson listen to the tapes has no technical value. Even amateurs can erase and record again, changing words or sentences without leaving tell-tale sounds detectable by ear. On the other hand, instrumental analysis is conclusive. Secondly, instrumental analysis can be done silently. The technicians need not hear what is on the tape. Thus, national security matters or matters of personal embarrassment to Nixon can be safeguarded. The third important point is that unintelligible words can often be made to be understandable through computer aided signal analysis and noise removal. Even if two people are speaking concurrently, voice prints of the speakers can be used to distinguish and identify the spoken words.

The suggested compromise is obvious. A small group of Judiciary Committee and White House Staff listen to all tapes to determine relevant portions. Then the technical experts authenticate the evidence and clarify the unintelligible words. The sensitive matters can be protected by using silent analysis.

If Nixon wishes to have all evidence looked at "fully and objectively", technical analysis must be included. If the public wishes to know all the truth, and wishes to believe their President, it must demand that all evidence be delivered intact, in original form for technical verification. No cut up pieces can be acceptable.

The nation has several competent teams to do the job. The group established for Judge Sirica's court is well experienced. Let them continue or let them vouch for the credentials of new workers. The latter is an important point, for this work requires an unusual amount of new technical sophistication.

In calling for all the evidence, we must cast Nixon's latest verification proposals into historical perspective. Last October Judge Sirica rejected similar proposals in his historic decision on White House evidence. The Prosecutor had argued that whole rolls of tapes must be delivered intact. When White House counsel objected that irrelevant material would be included, Sirica ruled that the court alone would decide on relevancy.

Had the White House delivered pieces of tapes or transcripts thereof, and copies of documents rather than originals, the public surely would not have learned of: deliberate tape erasures evidenced by unequivocal marks on the tapes; deliberate back-dating of property deeds evidenced by specific defects in typewriter keys; nor deliberate scissoring of documents as evidenced by comparison to earlier copies. It would appear that the White House has not been fair to the public in its handling of evidence.

Fairness to Nixon indeed requires that irrelevant material be screened out, but fairness to the public requires that staff of the Judiciary Committee control the screening. Nixon cannot be the sole arbiter of truth in the matter. We must have the complete, original evidence, not the Nixon version of it.

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