

# See Here, Mr. Drury

By WILLIAM A. RUSHER

Not long ago Allen Drury was given space in these columns to comment, from a conservative or at any rate a "moderate" standpoint, on the statement of twelve conservatives who in July announced their suspension of further support for President Nixon. As one of the twelve, I welcome this opportunity to reply.

Mr. Drury, though best known for his novels, is apparently doing a little officially authorized Boswelling around the White House these days, and in the circumstances it is not surprising that he could be co-opted to defend the President. What is surprising is the defense he elects to offer.

The original statement of the twelve conservatives was, we thought, appropriately modest, carefully balanced and (in a personal sense) even kind to the President. We noted the high hopes many conservatives had once held for the Nixon Presidency; we touched briefly on some of his solid achievements and a number of our nonetheless persisting domestic concerns; we next specified four areas of foreign and defense policy that disturbed us deeply, stressing "above all" the critical and continuing deterioration in the deterrent capability of our armed forces. In the light of these considerations, while reaffirming our personal admiration and even affection for Mr. Nixon, we announced our resolve to suspend further political support for him, pending future developments.

In response, Mr. Drury first carries on at considerable length, in a spirit of rather elephantine humor, about the "pouting panjandrums of the Righteous Right," the "Moody Elves of the Miffed Minority," and so on. (In the matter of witticisms, incidentally, Mr. Drury should meditate on the advisability of exchanging them with us. We are not defenseless.) "Presumably," he presumes (wrongly), the statement "was intended to drive millions of sensible conservatives screaming into the night."

And then, finally, he gets around to his defense of Mr. Nixon, such as it is. Are we running serious risks in foreign affairs and defense? Sure. "But note this: they are risks and he knows it." Is the charge of playing politics with such issues really so grave? "The gravity would come if what he does really, seriously, irrevocably and beyond recall endangers the country to the point where it cannot recover." Bear in mind that Richard Nixon is a "cool, calculating man, surrounded by . . . careful individuals with . . . careful charts." In the crucial matter of defense, a remarkable concession: "It is true, there are many disturbing trends that appear to be adding up to a steady and perhaps irreversible increase in

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Soviet advantage." But, after all, "unless a President is certifiably a traitor or an idiot, we have to assume that he knows what he is doing."

Feeling better? Neither am I.

The Drury defense is no defense at all. Logically, it is the twin brother of Jack Valenti's famous and fatuous remark that he slept better at night knowing that Lyndon Johnson was in the White House. It is like telling a man in a canoe, who finds himself a mile above Horseshoe Falls, that he must say nothing because the oarsman is an expert who can be presumed to know his business.

I do not for a moment doubt either Mr. Nixon's good intentions or his expertise, but neither he nor his charts are infallible. Our statement's frank alarm at the deterioration of this country's defense posture (to mention only one point) was all too clearly justified—not only because, as already noted, Mr. Drury himself practically concedes as much, but because the shocking facts were admitted repeatedly, in my hearing and by some of the very highest officials in this country, both before and after the statement was published. And I am astonished that Mr. Drury so misconceives the American governmental process as to suppose that a problem so grim, and so vast in its implications for the future, is the exclusive concern of the incumbent President and a handful of "careful individuals" around him, whose decisions must be accepted on blind faith.

An American President is not an omniscient mastermind, and responsible citizens are not to be dismissed with lollipops or deprecatory wisecracks when they raise serious questions about this country's elemental safety under his stewardship. If the defense situation is not, in Mr. Nixon's opinion, so grave as many competent authorities believe, the least he can do is say so. If he is gambling with this country's survival, in Vienna and Helsinki, on odds he considers justified, the American people deserve to know it. And if, as there is reason to suspect, the President privately shares the very concern Mr. Drury is at such pains to ridicule, he cannot, by blaming senatorial intransigence, escape the obligation to act on his knowledge. The central function of a President is to lead. Mr. Nixon is the President. Let him lead.

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