

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1972



Richard Nixon appears to have it in the bag, but inevitably one wonders whether his prospective satisfaction is everything that it should be. This side of the John Birch Society, no one suspects that Mr. Nixon personally contrived either the crippling of George Wallace, or the nomination of George McGovern, the two political events that have contributed most to the huge advantage Mr. Nixon shows in the opinion polls over his Democratic opponent.

No doubt he chafes at the prospect that the commentators will say, on Nov. 8, that what the hell, who couldn't have won, with George Wallace benched, and George McGovern as an opponent?

If you leave aside the objections to Nixon which are explainable on purely reflexive ideological grounds—he is a Republican, who stands for A B and C, whereas history and morality clearly argue for the Democrat, who stands for X Y and Z—you come down to a syndrome of objections to Nixon that are divisible in two parts. There are those who do not like Nixon, pure and simple, and would not like him any better if suddenly the clouds parted over Key Biscayne and an authoritative voice said: This is MY president in whom I am well pleased. Forget them—there is nothing to be done about them. But there are others, whose turn of mind is not ideological, who have no personal bias against Nixon, but who are suspicious of him, and suspicious of him for his apparent failure to level with the people on rather direct matters.

I give you an example, a letter from a lieutenant in the infantry. The young man wonders whether President Nixon isn't flatly guilty of protecting the big brass, when the brass gets into trouble. His specific objection is over the sweetheart prosecution of General Lavelle, who was caught bombing forbidden territory in North Vietnam.

No doubt the lieutenant was similarly offended by the apparent reluctance of the Pentagon to move against any of the high

Many suspect Nixon favors the big, rich

officials who were presumably involved in papering over the My Lai massacre.

The lieutenant writes, "The General apparently committed a profoundly serious offense in taking upon himself authority to disobey the orders he was given . . . He apparently deliberately disobeyed his orders in combat circumstances because he thought his judgment to be superior to that of the Commander-in-Chief . . . In response to this extremely grave offense, the government was astonishingly lenient with him. It might be noted that his retirement pay is consider-

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ably larger than the support received by families of most young men who sacrificed their lives in obedience of orders (orders they may have also disagreed with). The remarkable disparity between the gravity of the offense and the leniency of the punishment can be interpreted very easily as indication that those in authority did not, in fact, get very upset by what he did."

Another theme that recurs in recent correspondence is Mr. Nixon's reprieve of the sentence of James Hoffa (photo) followed conveniently by the Teamsters' endorsement of Richard Nixon's re-election.

Never mind that the case for Nixon's re-election is easy to make, as inuring to the benefit of everyone with the possible exception of the criminal and the utopianis classes—still, it looks like an engineered coincidence. And there are those who are willing to suspect that Nixon's indulgence towards Hoffa is a sly way of having the last say against John and Robert Kennedy, whose most conspicuous victim Hoffa was, never mind that he probably deserved it.

It emerges that there are many people in America who suspect that Mr. Nixon's administration is protective of individuals who are either (a) highly placed, or (b) rich, or (c) potentially useful, or (d) influential. I think that on the whole this probably is not true. But I think that the fact of its being thought to be true is what emerges as the existential truth in the social situation.

Accordingly, though I do not believe in bills of attainder, I think it would be socially satisfying if Mr. Nixon, and his Justice Department, and the Pentagon, would look for opportunities to point the gun barrel at some of the Big People in America who are vulnerable, whether as recalcitrant generals, or as tax cheats, or as influence peddlers.

One or two such prosecutions would help to restore faith in Mr. Nixon among those who do not have that faith. And that would have the additional advantage—need we point it out?—of increasing Mr. Nixon's vote of confidence next November.