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# Trouble Lies With Nixon's Friends

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HOW WILL it all end? is the question everybody has to ask about President Nixon as the returns from Watergate keep flooding in.

The ending could be happy if the President can shake loose from his friends. For his opponents clearly do not want to bring Mr. Nixon down.

Witness his Democratic adversaries. Their interest is to use the present weakness of the President to advance their men, their programs and their chances in coming elections. But ousting Mr. Nixon from the White House would wipe clean the Watergate slate. The Republicans would go in the 1974 elections with the issue resolved.

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A GOOD INDEX of the Democratic strategy in these circumstances comes from the confirmation hearings on the appointment of Elliot Richardson to be Attorney General. The Democrats undoubtedly drew blood. They insulated Richardson from the Watergate investigation by obliging him to accept a special prosecutor. They showed he was less than candid in divulging information about when knowledge of the burglary attempt on Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist came to the notice of the President.

But as the Judiciary Committee considered further steps, Senator Philip Hart of Michigan observed: 'When you add it all up we're not going to get anybody better than Richardson from this administration.'

Given this responsible attitude on the part of adversaries, Mr. Nixon clearly

could govern. He would have to take many more Democrats and liberal Republicans into his administration. He would have to free up lines of communications, and remember that the world is a big wide and wonderful place. But he could on those conditions have a considerable second term.

The trouble lies with the President's friends. His closest personal associates — former Attorney General John Mitchell and former White House aides H. R. Haldeman and John Erlichman — are not only implicated in sordid plots to obstruct justice. They did something far worse, something that made Watergate possible in the first place. They allowed the President to spin around him an atmosphere of dark suspicion about a liberal, academic, elitist plot to get the Nixon Administration.

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NOW THAT same act is being repeated. The latest presidential statement on Watergate conveys the impression of a White House that is a beleaguered fortress claiming the fight to commit all kinds of crimes in the name of national security. Mr. Nixon's speech to the Vietnam POWs expresses the same attitude.

None of this is going to do the country any good. It deepens the shadow of Watergate. It makes it harder to get decent men into government. It assures continued political turmoil. And it moves Mr. Nixon deeper and deeper into a position that leaves open to him only the convulsive acts of a desperate man.