

What Kind Of Moral Fiber?

By TOM WICKER

The spectacle of Richard Nixon piously pledging to "halt the erosion of moral fiber in American life and the denial of individual accountability for individual action" is obscene.

What kind of moral fiber does it take for a man in the once lofty office of the President to tolerate the services of paid agents of his re-election committee who were hired to eavesdrop, forge, fake, lie and harass?

And what kind of "individual accountability" is it for Mr. Nixon and all his lieutenants to insist that they have no responsibility for or knowledge about a meticulously planned and fatly financed campaign of political skulduggery against the Democrats, when sworn affidavits and official files are said by reputable publications to show that the funds (running into hundreds of thousands of dollars) were kept in the office safe of Maurice Stans, Mr. Nixon's one-time Secretary of Commerce and now his chief fundraiser, and that a White House contact man for the ring of spies, saboteurs and provocateurs was Dwight Chapin, the President's own appointments secretary?

These charges have not been proven in court, but the evidence is mounting so rapidly and so massively that it is simply not good enough for the President of the United States and his

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top aides blandly to deny any responsibility or knowledge, as if they had no responsibility, either, for the good name of the Government or to refute the impression of official lawlessness and lack of scruple that is being created.

Particularly because the investigation of the matter is under the political control of his own Justice Department, Mr. Nixon ought at least to suspend Mr. Chapin without prejudice until the matter is cleared up to public satisfaction. Can anyone doubt what Mr. Nixon himself would have said of the situation that now exists, back in his days of lambasting the Truman Administration for "Communism, corruption and appeasement?" Or if Mr. Truman's press secretary had said, as Mr. Nixon's has, that he would not "dignify" serious charges

by replying to them?

And when such a cloud of suspicion is hanging over his own office, it behooves Mr. Nixon to take to the radio to preach the falsehoods that he is more against crime than the Democrats, that he has done something effective to stop crime in his four years in office and that his is an Administration that promotes "the moral and legal values" of the nation. Only if wiretapping and bugging political opponents, without benefit of court order or any other valid authorization, have either a moral or legal value can this Administration claim to have done much for either one; and the Supreme Court, including the President's own appointees, ordered his Justice Department spies to stop doing that.

As for the dubious statistics Mr. Nixon flung about in his radio broadcast, only a few points will suffice to show him shuffling the pea from shell to shell:

¶He said serious crime had risen by 122 per cent in the eight years before he took office, but by only 1 per cent so far this year; but the truth—which Mr. Nixon did not reach—is that in the first three years of his Administration, serious crimes increased by 30 per cent to an all-time high, and in a one-year period from 1971 to 1972 rapes increased by 25 per cent in the nation's suburbs (all F.B.I. statistics).

¶Mr. Nixon said crime in the District of Columbia had been cut by 50 per cent; his opponent—Mr. Nixon is a candidate for office after all—Senator George McGovern, immediately produced his own statistics to show that serious crimes had risen in the District from 49,360 in 1968 to 51,256 last year, but at least had the grace to point out the more important fact that "the falsification of D.C. crime statistics has been extensively documented."

Mr. Nixon thumped his chest about calling for tough new sentences for drug pushers. But James Vorenberg of the Harvard Law School, the former chairman of the National Crime Commission and now Mr. McGovern's chief adviser on crime and justice, has pointed out that Mr. Nixon has provided no Federal resources for drug addicts who voluntarily seek out methadone and other treatment programs by the thousands; this despite the fact that he is the first President to have at his disposal the half-billion dollars a year provided for the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration by a Democratic Congress at the instigation of the Democratic Administration of Lyndon B. Johnson and his Attorney General, Ramsey Clark.

Mr. Nixon also repeated his fatuous claim that by appointing "strict constructionists" to the bench he has provided more law and order. He did not point out that Mr. Justice Rehnquist's contribution had been to become the first Supreme Court Justice in history who had to write a defense of his participation in a case in which he had a clear prior interest.