

First Republic

(1789-)

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

It has been whispered around this scandal-soaked city for months as one of those things that you're morally certain of but can't prove. The rumors suggested that many of those millions of dollars CREEP had stuck in its dozens of safes and strongboxes had been extorted from businessmen across the country. Now comes American Airlines fessing up and saying it made illegal contributions under pressure from Herbert Kalmbach who, it charged, acted as a White House juiceman.

Following immediately on the American Airlines announcement was one by Eastern saying it too had been solicited, but had refused to pay up. Next comes word from Watergate prosecutor Cox's office that they have reason to believe literally hundreds of businessmen have been leaned on by White House shakedown artists. A new type is born, the gangster with a White House pass and a top security clearance riding around in a government limousine.

Naturally, Richard Nixon didn't know anything about this either, even though the list of business victims was uncovered in his confidential secretary's desk drawer. And just as naturally this list, exactly like the enemies list, isn't what it seems, but is actually a harmless guide as to who to invite to White House social functions. And Al Capone was the founder of the American Red Cross.

Up there in the sky with the Big Boss, the Saints of the Syndicate must be waiting for Richard Nixon to die so they can ask him, "Howdja do it?" We on earth might speculate on how close we have come to having our government overthrown by its President.

That happened last year when Ferdinand E. Marcos, president of the Philippines, overthrew his. The apologia for the act is one that Ziegler could use should it ever enter His Leadership's head to rule by martial law, too. A few weeks ago, Marcos bought a 32-page four-color supplement in the New York Times to explain his "government reorganization" to would-be investors and other Americans with a sentimental interest in Philippine liberty.

Titled "Philippine Prospects: After 26 years of democratic stalemate, dynamic leadership directs the Republic toward the New Society," the document is classic Zieglerian prose.

Substituting His Leadership's name—we dare not write the sacred syllables—for Mr. Marcos' can't you hear the Ziggy Ron himself explaining that it was constitutionally appropriate to declare the Constitution inappropriate with these words: "Rather than follow the traditional practice of apportioning patronage among the factions allied to him in the form of a Cabinet and subcabinet appointments, Mr. Nixon gathered into his official family a group of young nonpolitical personalities—men who, while they command no votes or powerful patrons, have made names for themselves in business industry, finance and the learned professions."

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And can't you imagine justifying the act in the identical words Marcos uses to dump on his congress: "The balance of power among factions prevented national leadership from innovating or making hard decisions about major problems. Policy was merely the lowest common denominator of what the majority of factions would tolerate—to the detriment of such controversial legislation as . . . progressive taxation . . ." (so) Mr.

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COMMENTARY, From B1

Nixon armed himself with the last constitutional defense available to him. He invoked martial law."

And then there is this what-are-you-making-such-a-fuss-about passage: ". . . Martial law has been characterized by a strict adherence to constitutionality. Many outsiders have remarked on the absence of tanks from the streets of Washington . . . the 150 odd political detainees—politicians, intellectuals, journalists—found themselves, in the hands not of totalitarian automatons but of fellow human beings. Visiting privileges are liberal, and leave . . . is easily arranged to attend a daughter's wedding, to visit a parent in the hospital and other sentimental occasions."

See, we let Senator Sam go home to North Carolina for Christmas, and if these imaginings strike you as shrill or hysterically farfetched, tick off on your fingers what we know they did or attempted to do: thuggery, muggery, burglary, perjury, etc, etc.

To this impeachment might be a constitutionally appropriate response, but failing that we could all write Julie and beg of her to say, "Cool, man, I can dig it." the next time Dad looks across the dinner table and asks if he should quit.

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Also:

- 27 Apr 70 - The Nation
- 8 May 70 - L.A. Free Press
- 15 Jun 70 - SFChronicle
- Aug 70 - Scanlan's Magazine (one page)
- 22 Jul 70 - NYTimes
- 22 Jul 70 - SFChronicle
- 30 Jul 70 - NYTimes
- 28 May 73 - SFChronicle