



# The President's Change of Heart

**Joseph Kraft**

FOR A YEAR Mr. Nixon and his men managed Watergate with such consummate skill that the administration nearly got off unscathed. So it is not enough for the President merely to say that he wants to get the truth now.

He has to prove it. To prove it he has to go beyond criminal investigation, to a close look at the moral standards of the men in his entourage.

Suspicious are in order because the administration organized in the very first hours last June a truly concerted effort to pass off the Watergate break-in as a trivial, slightly comic affair.

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THAT STANCE was maintained even when it became known that one of those apprehended in the break-in was James McCord, the security man at the Committee to Reelect the President.

But the top man at the committee, former Attorney General John Mitchell, identified McCord in an exquisite piece of lawyer's prose as though he were some remote private dick, a million miles below the level of the presidential campaign. According to Mitchell, McCord was "the proprietor of a private security agency who was employed by our committee months ago to assist with the installation of our security system. He has, as we understand it, a number of business clients and interests, and we have no knowledge of these relationships."

Thanks to not a little White House disparagement of those trying to get at the truth, that cock-and-bull story of total divorce between Watergate and the admin-

istration led a charmed life.

In the end one unlikely figure forced out the truth. Federal Judge John Sirica did not believe what the witnesses told him in the trial of the Watergate seven. He arranged the sentencing to force the defendants to talk. Eventually McCord broke.

Suddenly Republicans across the country began pressing the White House for the full truth. Their pressure armed a Senate inquiry into Watergate led by Sam Ervin of North Carolina.

Still the administration hung tough. Mr. Nixon had issued a statement on executive privilege. And there were backstage maneuvers with the Ervin committee to go easy on certain aides. Only when the committee rejected these maneuvers was the stage set for Mr. Nixon's announcement a week ago.

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CHARACTERISTICALLY, the President gave almost no ground. But he did say he discovered new evidence, presumably in an investigation by Assistant Attorney General Henry Petersen of the charge that John W. Dean lied to the FBI. He says the new evidence convinced him that Watergate was more serious than he supposed. So he directed White House officials to testify to the Senate committee with only minor restrictions.

Most of the country will probably sigh with relief at Mr. Nixon's action. The story that he wants to force out the truth will probably be widely accepted.

But those who have followed this affair closely will want further evidence of the President's change of heart.