

# Soviets See Anti-Nixon Plot in U.S.

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BELGRADE, May 14 — Soviet representatives in Eastern Europe have told Westerners that the Watergate scandal appears to them to be a "conspiracy" by powerful forces in the United States opposed to detente with Moscow.

The plot theory has been floated by a number of Soviet journalists and Communist editors regularly based in Belgrade, Bucharest, Warsaw and Moscow. According to this theory, reactionary American elements, which have never accepted the rapprochement with the Communists initiated by Mr. Nixon, have organized a plot to discredit him.

The Watergate case seems to have baffled and dismayed Communist representatives. Mr. Nixon is an admired figure in all official circles of Eastern Europe. His name is linked to pragmatic American efforts to increase trade and tone down the ideological debate between East and West. Tangible proof of Soviet confidence in Mr. Nixon's ability to survive the Watergate crisis was given this weekend when dates for Soviet party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev's visit to the United States next month were announced.

The concern in Communist circles over Mr. Nixon's position was perhaps summed up best by a Polish editor who was explaining the scant coverage of the Watergate affair in the Polish news media.

From our standpoint, Richard Nixon is the best possible American president in the cur-

rent circumstances, and we don't want to see him embarrassed."

Soviet representatives who accept the conspiracy theory are unimpressed by evidence that the earliest assailants of the administration's handling of Watergate were liberal newspapers which supported East-West bridge building even before Mr. Nixon did.

For instance, one Soviet journalist insisted that The Washington Post must have had powerful forces supporting it in order to have conducted the kind of investigation it did.

"It couldn't have done it on its own," he asserted. The same journalist suggested that "a Rockefeller" could stop the process of detente if he wanted to. He did not specify whether he was referring to Gov. Nelson Rockefeller or to Chase Manhattan's David Rockefeller, who is probably better known in the Soviet Union as a symbol of American capitalism.

Soviet representatives seem genuinely confused by the scandal itself and puzzled by the implications that Americans draw from it. One Soviet journalist paled visibly when told by an American here that there might be a "10 per cent chance, no more" of Mr. Nixon's resigning.

The conspiracy theory may have been hastily drawn up by Soviet representatives as a plausible explanation for an

implausible state of affairs in Washington. The Soviet leadership has only recently dealt with its own reactionary elements by dumping several apparent opponents of detente from high positions. Thus, it may be natural for Soviets to assume that such opposition exists in the United States as well.

On this point, Western experts in Moscow say that the extent of support for Mr. Nixon's foreign policy in the United States had been consistently underestimated by East Europeans and Russians raised in the atmosphere of sustained cold war. So it is natural for Russians to worry now about "powerful forces" upsetting this process.

There is nothing to indicate that Brezhnev accepts the Watergate plot theory against Mr. Nixon. Western diplomats believe he receives excellent information on the Washington scene from Ambassador Anatoliy Dobrynin.

Therefore the circulation of the plot theory by Soviet representatives raises the question whether it may itself be an attempt to warn liberals and other supporters of the East-West dialogue against any steps that could make detente a casualty of the Watergate affair.