

# Down to the Level of 'Business'

By Arnold Toynbee

LONDON—The United States' business is also the world's business. This is one of the present facts of life, though it is a nuisance both for United States' citizens and for the 94 per cent of the planet's population who are aliens.

The economic affairs of the United States have been seriously affecting the rest of the world for at least the last hundred years. Since Pearl Harbor, the United States has been playing a militant part in the competition between the superpowers. Since then, the United States' economic power and bombing power (both conventional and nuclear) have come to be of vital concern to the rest of the human race. Therefore Watergate is the whole world's affair.

The financial corruption that has been brought to light in connection with Watergate is sensational.

However, this is not the heart of Watergate. The legal and constitutional aspects are still more—far more—grave than the financial aspects. One of the organs of the Government of the United States appears to have broken and obstructed the law and violated the Constitution. The organ in question is the keystone of the executive.

At this stage the White House can be stigmatized only collectively and in impersonal terms. It is certain that the illegal action was planned and executed with the knowledge and consent, if not on the initiative and at the instigation of persons employed in the White House who, at the time, were members of the President's personal staff. Some of these illegal activities were designed to deceive the electorate and to smear the Democratic party; others were attempts to cover up these operations.

For non-Americans, the strangest and most questionable feature of the Government of the United States is the President's political family. Whereas the President himself is elected, his nominee for the Vice Presidency is elected or defeated automatically on the President's ticket. It is notorious that the Vice President has little power, but the President, after his election, appoints a band of personal aides and advisers. These appointments are made by the President autocratically. The electorate has no say in this. Yet some of the President's personal minions have greater power *de facto* than any

officer of the United States Government—say in the State Department or in the Department of Justice or in the Treasury—who has been appointed by constitutionally established procedures. Indeed, the President's personal appointees have greater power than members of the Cabinet.

Nonelected aides and advisers of the President who wield enormous power *de facto* without having any precisely defined constitutional status, are not novelties. For instance, at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, all participants were acutely aware of Colonel House's power, though they never knew exactly what Colonel House was or was not empowered by President Wilson to do in the President's name. Nor did they know, except in rueful retrospect, how far the President himself had the power to implement the agreements that he had made with the plenipotentiaries of associated powers.

This point is highly relevant to Watergate. President Wilson, like President Nixon, brought upon himself a conflict with Congress over the issue of the President's and Congress' respective constitutional powers. When once this issue has been raised, the Congress fights implacably to vindicate its constitutional rights, and this domestic conflict in the United States makes it virtually impossible for foreign governments to transact business effectively with the United States Government. The foreign governments have to continue to deal with the reigning President, but they cannot be sure that their dealings with him may not turn out to have been labor lost.

Foreigners could not know the extent of Colonel House's power to implement undertakings made by him on the President's behalf. They also could not know the extent of President Wilson's power to secure the constitutionally required agreement of the Congress to agreements which the President had made with foreign governments. But everyone did know that both President Wilson and Colonel House, who was his principal adviser in Paris in 1919, were personally men of deservedly good repute, and that they were worthy to be, respectively, the President of the United States and the President's adviser.

The Founding Fathers of the United States had been virtually aristocrats

in the sense of being honorable and distinguished men who were respected and followed by the American people because the people rightly believed that these chosen leaders of theirs were both experienced and honest politically. Down to the time of President Wilson and Colonel House at least, the electorate elected Presidents, and the President chose advisers who, on the whole, deserved the confidence in their moral integrity that had been accorded to them.

In the Founding Fathers' time, the American people (leaving slaves out of account) was composed of a majority of free-holding farmers and a minority of rural landlords and urban artisans and members of the liberal professions.

The number of businessmen (e.g., traders, industrial entrepreneurs, financiers) was relatively small. Since then, the social composition of the American people has changed. Not long ago it was said that "America's business is business." "Business," in the specialized meaning of the word, exposes its practitioners to greater opportunities and temptations to behave dishonestly and unscrupulously than are met with by farmers or by members of the liberal professions—with the signal exception of lawyers.

The "unacceptable face of private enterprise" (Mr. Heath's phrase apropos of a current business scandal in the United Kingdom) has revealed itself in Watergate. America's political business seems now to have become "business" of the unacceptable kind. In all the so-called "developed" countries, and perhaps most of all in the United States, the standard of ethical conduct in "business" has sunk below the average standard in other kinds of social relations. The operators in the White House have recently included not only lawyers but men recruited from the "business" world, including men whose previous careers had been in advertising.

One cause of the decline of political morality in America is that this has now sunk to the lowest level of American "business" morality.

Arnold Toynbee is the eminent British historian and philosopher.