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Outrageous Exploitation

By Franklin B. Smith

BURLINGTON, Vt.—The Watergate affair has been outrageously exploited by both the American press and the Congress. It all adds up to a vicious political stunt, an anti-Nixon vendetta which is utterly appalling in its depth of hatred and recrimination.

A large portion of the press (and here we include newspapers, television, radio and magazines) has indulged constantly in sensational reckless and distorted reportage of this unhappy affair, and Senator Ervin's Watergate circus committee has been only too happy to provide the cheap political showmanship that fuels the vendetta for the amusement of the masses.

Our intelligence and sense of decency have been grossly insulted by the double standard, the rank of hypocrisy and the moral put-on so evident in both the official investigation and the press coverage of Watergate. The end result of all this and the real tragedy of Watergate is that there is no perspective about it and little attempt is made to provide this prospective. Hysteria has overcome rationality.

The plain fact is that there would be no Watergate sensation at all if (1) the party in control of Congress were not the opposition party and (2) much of the press were not hostile to the President and his policies.

How otherwise can we explain the commotion over illegal corporation donations to President Nixon's re-election campaign when no mention is made of the massive labor union donations (also illegal under Federal law) to various Democratic campaigns through the years?

Or how can we explain the outrage over the "bugging" of Nixon's White House when it is an acknowledged fact that every President since Franklin D. Roosevelt has done essentially the same thing? Why was there no great wringing of hands when the Kennedy brothers bugged the hotel room of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights march on Washington ten years ago?

Or how can we explain the furor over President Nixon's use of "national security" as an excuse for a

"cover-up" of Watergate when for example President Roosevelt was not pilloried for using "national security" as an excuse for a "cover-up" blaming Admiral Kimmel and General Short for the Pearl Harbor disaster?

Or how can we explain the extreme concern over the amount of money spent on improvements at President Nixon's homes in Florida and California when no great interest was ever shown in the amount of money spent on the Virginia country home built for Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy while her husband was President or in the amount of money spent on construction of the heliport at the LBJ Ranch when Lyndon Johnson was President, and so on?

And if the press and the Congress were truly concerned about the sabotaging of national elections, where was their sense of moral outrage in 1960 when "lost" and destroyed ballots in Illinois, Texas and Missouri actually swung the election?

Yet our colleagues in the press and our legislators in Congress keep telling us that never before have the higher echelons of Government, including the Oval Office itself, been involved to such a degree in shoddy practice. But how do they know, how does anybody know when nothing has ever been covered with such expansive hysteria as the Watergate affair?

And thus again the ultimate tragedy of Watergate is the total lack of perspective and the partisan disinclination of the press and Congress to provide perspective.

We can only conclude that the name and the personality of the man in the Oval Office makes all the difference and this is a damning indictment of our public "watchdogs" especially the press whose sense of purpose and responsibility has been mangled.

This anti-Nixon vendetta has long since passed the point of acceptance of indignation of reason and conscience. We condemn this reportage and exploitation of hatred which is vastly more destructive of public faith in our Government of processes than is the overblown Watergate affair itself.

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