

Talking Around The Big Muddy

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Having taken away our bread, President Truthful now wants to do away with our Watergate circus. Life wasn't so bad when we could clutch our empty bellies while we watched Senator Sam clobber the Leader of the Free World on television. If it didn't take our minds off the empty shelves in the supermarkets and the high prices, the senator with his North Carolina Jug Band gave us a healthy outlet for our anger.

A fair judge would say that President Truthful's speech the other night was better than the previous attempts and rate it only as dreadful. The improvement over the time before was sufficiently great that we may suppose that if he reworks his Watergate routine about twice more, his version of those events will move from the preposterous to the improbable.

Take his sissing and moaning over the tapes. He thinks handing them over to the authorities would compromise the confidentiality of the presidency, does he? If he wants to maintain, not the integrity of his office but his conduct of the office, he might consider refraining from clandestine bugging of his telephone calls and his conversations.

His I-Was-A-Dupe-Of-The-FBI act is better calculated to evoke giggles than indignation. "Because I trusted the agencies conducting the investigation," our Little Boy Blue prexy told us, "and because I believed the report I was getting, I did not believe the newspaper accounts that suggested a cover-up." So, okay, then how come L. Patrick Gray, his chief of his FBI, calls him up a couple of weeks after the break-in and tells him that "people on your staff are trying to mortally wound you by using the CIA and FBI, by confusing the question of CIA interest in, or not in, the people the FBI wishes to interview."

Even a fella all taken up with getting peace with honor by giving away our wheat to the Russians might have paused for a small minute and said, "Patsy, old buddy, old daugler in the wind, who? Who on my staff is trying to mortally wound me?" The Gray-Nixon conversation took place on July 6, 1972, and if our deceived and betrayed leader had spoken that one three-letter word he might not have been caught on coast-to-coast TV on Aug. 16, 1973, trying to tell us that, ". . . I pressed repeatedly to know the facts, and particularly whether there was any involvement by anyone at the White House."

On April 15 of this year Henry Petersen, the head of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, a guy Nixon describes as a man with "an impeccable non-

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partisan record," has testified that he told President Truthful that the two German Shepherds were up to their eyeballs in trouble and he'd better fire 'em. He also said he should keep Dean, so it didn't look like a guy who was cooperating with the investigation was being punished. So Nixon fires Dean and allows the krauts to retire voluntarily with their sidearms.

You could go through almost every paragraph of that speech and pick it to tatters. But the excuse offered for the crime committed on his behalf and in his name

is enough to melt the wax in a hippy's ears: ". . . in the 1960s, as individuals and groups increasingly asserted the right to take the law into their own hands . . . their attitude was praised in the press and from some of our pulpits . . . The notion that the end justifies the means proved contagious. Thus it is not surprising, even though deplorable, that some persons in 1972 adopted the morality that they themselves had rightly condemned, and committed acts that have no place in our political system."

Teeheel. There is John Mitchell, Maurice Stans, the two bloodwursts, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, Tony

Ulasewicz, the ex-NYPD peeping tom, all of them infected by the sight of some raggedy-pants, inner-city Methodist minister flopping down in front of a bus to protest the war or school segregation. Can't you just see Hard Jawn and Maurice the Collector saying, "Well, if that black Baptist buzzard can parade around from Selma to Montgomery why can't we take it under the table from Bob Vesco or Goodyear Rubber?" Put that in the category of conversations you can bet never got themselves conversed.

But take that argument a step further. If the criminal behavior of all those college kids is going to have such

a powerfully contagious effect on the highest government officials in the country that we should sympathize with the boys in the Casa Blanca, what do you think is happening to Vice President Eggplant by hanging out with Frank Sinatra and his friends? Or, why can't every police chief in the country turn gangster and then cop a plea by saying it was the Mafia that set them such a poor example?

President Truthful, poormouthing and mendicant for our support, is waist deep, mired and wallowing in the Big Muddy Watergate.