

Watergate: Some Hangin' Matters

By Art Buchwald

We have been warned by everyone that all the people indicted in the Watergate affair must be presumed innocent until proven guilty, and we concur.

But there are crimes they have committed for which they must be presumed guilty until proven innocent.

Here is a short list.

PURCHASING CHEAP RECORDING EQUIPMENT FOR THE PRESIDENT

This not only has caused Mr. Nixon embarrassment, but could be responsible for his downfall. By trying to save a few bucks on tape machines, the former aides to the President must take the blame not only for tapes that do not exist, but also for the erased ones that do.

SLOPPY FILING METHODS

No administration has had such messy files since Ulysses S. Grant. Every time the Special Prosecutor or the House Judiciary Committee lawyers ask for a relevant paper, no one seems to know where it is. This is even more tragic when you consider that everyone around the President looked so neat and clean you just assumed they would keep neat files.

BAD BOOKKEEPING

Before the Watergate scandal everyone assumed that President Nixon was surrounded by bookkeepers. It now turns out that no one had any experience in finance and large sums of money kept getting lost and being put in the wrong ledgers. Probably the biggest problem was that everyone was dealing in cash which is harder to keep track of than checks.

KEEPING SECRETS

This is one of the most serious charges. As far as we know everyone kept secrets from everybody else in the White House. No one knew what the other person was doing. President Nixon, if we are to believe him, knew nothing at all. By keeping secrets from each other it was impossible for the staff to stick to the same story when Watergate was uncovered.

HAVING A FALSE SENSE OF SECURITY ABOUT THE FBI AND THE CIA

One of the many crimes ex-administration officials are guilty of is believing that the FBI and CIA would follow orders of the White House without questioning them. This false faith in these two institutions might have been the beginning of their undoing. The tragedy of Watergate is that the FBI and CIA could not be counted on to cover up goofs in the administration.

BELIEF IN THE MANDATE

This is not a felony, but a misdemeanor. Everyone around the President believed the election results in 1972 would guarantee that no one would be interested in how he won his mandate. Had Nixon aides not been interested in winning a mandate, there might never have been a Watergate.

OVERACHIEVING AT FUND-RAISING

The success of the Nixon fund-raising drive was one of the main reasons everything went wrong. Had the Committee for the Re-election of the President been short of money, it never would have had the finances to get them in so much trouble. When you're broke you have no choice but to put funds into billboards and TV commercials. When you're flush you have a tendency to hire spies and private detectives to do dirty work for you.

PLAYING TENNIS WITH EACH OTHER

The Nixon people only played tennis with each other, which kept them from knowing what the rest of the country was thinking. Had they let outsiders into their game they might have realized that what they were plotting for the President was wrong.

WEARING THE AMERICAN FLAG PIN IN THEIR LAPELS

It is no crime to wear an American Flag in your lapel. But it is a crime to believe that by wearing one everything that you tell a grand jury automatically will be believed.

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