

Listening Pleasure—All on Tape

By Art Buchwald

It looks as if there's going to be some hard bargaining between President Nixon's lawyer, James St. Clair, and Judiciary counsel John Doar over the tapes and evidence the House committee has subpoenaed. While the President has said he was willing to cooperate fully with the House so we could put Watergate behind us, Mr. St. Clair as his defense lawyer has to think of protecting his client.

This is how the negotiating may go.

"Mr. Doar, this is James St. Clair. How's everything on The Hill?"

"Just fine, Mr. St. Clair. What's new at the White House that we should know about?"

"That's what I'm calling about. You guys didn't have to send us a subpoena. We promised we'd cooperate with you fully. When you voted a subpoena it made it sound as if we were dragging our feet."

"I know."

"Now look, Doar, we want to be reasonable down here and we're willing to give you everything you've asked for."

"You are?"

"Yes, with the only exception that it doesn't harm the Presidency or violate the Constitution. As Mr. Nixon's lawyer I believe I'm in the best position to know what is relevant to your impeachment hearings. I've sifted through every piece of evidence and I give you my word a lot of the stuff you're requesting is not worth fighting for."

"How do we know that if we haven't heard the tapes?"

"I heard them, and the President's heard them, and H.R. Haldeman's heard them. Why can't you take our word for it that there is absolutely nothing on them that can contribute to Mr. Nixon's impeachment? What on earth would we have to gain by keeping evidence from your committee?"

"I'm certain, Mr. St. Clair, that what you say is true, but there are some members of the committee

who have a thing about Presidential tapes. Now are you going to turn them over to us?"

"That's what I'm calling about. We're willing to give you 42 tapes as requested."

"Then we don't have a problem."

"But the President feels he should have the right to decide what 42 tapes to give you. That's only fair."

"I don't get you."

"The President is offering instead of the Kleindienst telephone conversation of April 15 a tape of his call to congratulate Don Shula of the Miami Dolphins for winning the Super Bowl. The President says it's a much jazzier tape and he's sure the entire House committee would enjoy it.

"He is also offering in place of his conversations with Haldeman and Ehrlichman on April 16, 1973, the complete unedited tape of his talk with David Eisenhower on Feb. 12, 1969. He would also like to substitute the Colson material you've asked for with a tape of a very funny meeting he had in the Oval Office with Miss Cherry Blossom of 1972.

"To show his good faith the President has authorized me to turn over to you the tapes of all the prayer breakfasts at the White House, as well as a complete tape of Pearl Bailey singing 'When The Saints Go Marching In.' Furthermore, he is throwing in a tape of a personal message he dictated to Secretariat when he won the Triple Crown.

"He feels these tapes are something the House could play over and over again. Believe me, Mr. Doar, the ones you people have asked for are dull and repetitious, and you'd be bored to death. The ones we're offering you would give you hours of listening pleasure."

"Thanks, Mr. St. Clair, but no thanks. We still want the tapes we asked for."

"Okay Doar. The President asked me to give you a message if you refused his generous offer."

"What is that?"

"He told me to tell you 'That does it. No more Mr. Nice Guy.'"