

Readers Discuss the Nixon Tapes

Too Lenient

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

In my opinion your editorials of May 1 and May 2 are much too lenient on Mr. Nixon. I agree that he may not have been guilty of an impeachable offense, but do we want such a man in the White House?

He has delayed a year, "buying time," he has left unintelligible gaps, he has given transcripts rather than the tapes themselves, he has side-stepped, sparred, etc. He has ruined the careers of several otherwise fine young men, he has allowed the laundering of much money and accepted money from questionable sources, (he even admits he could raise a million for nefarious purposes, although he did not allow that, ultimately), and he tried to avoid the payment of proper income taxes to a substantial amount, which he now will pay after being put on the spot.

Again I ask, do we want that kind of man in the White House?

ALAN D. WHITNEY

Winnetka, Ill.

Incredible Reaction

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Unbelievable! Incredible! That is my reaction to your editorial "The President's Offer." I find your logic (or lack of) amazing when you describe the President's offer of edited transcripts of White House tapes as "generous." Even more absurd is your contention that the Rodino Committee should accept the President's offer of the edited transcripts. I thought you must be unaware of the notorious 18 minute gap, the missing tapes, the fact that the accused do not select the evidence to be used against them, and some indications that the President may not be entirely trustworthy. But surprisingly, further reading of the editorial indicates your awareness of these problems.

Likewise, the fact that the lead article on the front page quotes the President as agreeing to bribery also testifies to the naivete of your position. The Rodino Committee's insistence on original tapes is not, as you claim, similar to little boys whose toys have been taken away. The Committee and the country must have access to reliable evidence and has no reason to trust the President and his lackeys.

JOHN E. COOPER

Portland, Ore.

Comparative Conversations

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Before we draw the conclusion that the conversations, as revealed in the tapes, determine Mr. Nixon's character to be that of an "empty man," we should have similar private conversations of other politicians to compare them to.

Unfortunately, we can only in imagination conjecture as to how cynical, how engrossed with "public deception," how concerned with public image and not at all concerned with the morality of the situation the conversations may have been between Sen. Edward Kennedy and his lawyers in the early morning hours after Chappaquidick. We know how his brother, President John Kennedy, laughingly called his falsehoods to the American people in the 1960 campaign, when he warned of "the Missile Gap," only "campaign rhetoric." The media laughed with him. We can wonder how the conversations went, how noble the language used, when President John Kennedy talked with Attorney General Bobby Kennedy about the heads of the steel companies during that crisis. We do know something of what happened afterwards: the harassment of the steel executives by the FBI in the dead of night and by the IRS later.

If we could hear what President Lyndon Johnson had to say, privately, regarding Bobby Baker, we would know if he wanted all facts to be revealed immediately, we would know if his language was exemplary, we would know if he put the morals of the situation before his own public image. We do know the Senate voted not to investigate the matter, with all the Democratic members of the (later) Senate Watergate Committee voting against revealing all to the American people.

Perhaps such imaginings are cynical themselves; but the fact remains that we have, so far, no other private conversations to compare these to. Did other Presidents and Senators do better in a pinch?

M. S. NORFLEET

Albuquerque, N.M.

Wondering

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

In your lead editorial "The Imaginary Men" (May 7) you express dismay and chagrin because the tapes reveal Richard Nixon as a politician, capable of at least considering the possible use of "black-mail" and other unsavory means of winning elections and besting one's political adversaries. No doubt these revelations will cause millions of Americans to "turn the rascals out" in the coming elections, and we will have the noble, Simon-pure Democrats in overwhelming control of the Congress and the presidency.

Overlooked and ignored will be the great accomplishments in foreign policy of the Nixon years, and we will be led once again by the people who managed to involve us in four foreign wars during this century, with two near-misses (Bay of Pigs, Cuban missile crisis).

One wonders what a publication of tapes of the secret conversations of the Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations would have revealed. Are we to assume that these knights in shining armor never engaged in political chicanery? Are we to assume that no "dirty tricks" were ever considered by Presidents who welcomed the support of Tammany Hall, or the Kelly-Daley machine, etc.?

R. CONTY

New York

No Generosity

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

In your editorial, you describe the President's submission of edited transcripts in place of the subpoenaed tapes as "generous." I fail to see the generosity. The transcripts were submitted, belatedly, after extraordinary pleading and full legal pressure.

I do think the President has been treated with generosity, restraint, patience, tolerance and maturity by the American public and by the various committees and agencies investigating his affairs. In return the President, as we see in his tax matters, has treated us in a much smaller spirit. He has delayed the furnishing of Watergate evidence and then accused others of "wallowing" in the affair.

In the next to last paragraph of your ed-

itorial you note that, "If only yesterday's release of documents had come a year ago, how much grief and turmoil would have been avoided." Have you forgotten that a year ago (more or less) the existence of the tapes in question was being kept secret by a President who then and now says he was doing all he could to get the truth out?

THEODORE M. ZORN

Minneapolis

Destroying the GOP

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Mr. Nixon hasn't changed in all the years he's been in politics but thanks to the media, the American electorate has a much keener insight into the man. It is doubtful that he could "snooker" the public again, but he is trying, "and that's for sure."

The saddest part of all is to view that once-great and proud political party—the Republicans—being dragged down the sewer along with those paragons of "law and order"—Messrs. Nixon and Agnew.

Republicans who fall into lockstep with the White House on this crucial disclosure are aiding and abetting the ultimate destruction of the Republican Party and the continued deception of the American public.

JEROME E. SCHWARTZ

Bloomfield, N.J.

Off the Mark

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

It seems to me that what you are trying to do is make it appear that Mr. Nixon should not be impeached unless he can be proven to have actively participated in an indictable crime. Your editorials, Mr. Royster's column and your guest writers all try to show us that he cannot specifically be tagged with any one specific crime and as such is "innocent."

Gentlemen, you are 'way off the mark. We are talking about the President of our country, not some accountant, stockbroker or corporate treasurer—the kind of people, by the way, whose crimes you unfortunately have to report on almost a daily basis nowadays.

No, this is our President, our leader in affairs of state and the world and up to whom we and our children are supposed to look! Mr. Nixon has denigrated the office and thereby has insulted every citizen of our country. He must be removed—to "protect the presidency" and save our country.

GEORGE G. SCHREIBER

Saddle River, N.J.

An Odorous Collection

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Does Vermont Royster's analysis of Richard Nixon's actions represent the best thinking *The Wall Street Journal* can bring us? If so, your editorial page is markedly lacking in the depth that characterizes your reportage.

Mr. Royster "strokes" our souls with his vicar's comments on morality and then proceeds to the White House line where the President is an innocent done in by this year's scapegoat, John Dean.

Mr. Nixon populated the White House with the most odorous collection of pirates our nation has known. As boss, he "committed" no overt crimes; he shepherded and protected the criminals, who, being carefully chosen, knew exactly what was expected of them. They are all his soul brothers and anyone who doesn't realize it by now has far less excuse than those "good Germans" who didn't know what Hitler was up to.

PAUL WELLER

New York

Shallow

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Your editorial of May 7 condemning the President seems very shallow to me.

Based entirely on the Watergate tapes it surely does not give the picture of the whole man. Have you heard tapes of his talks with Mr. Kissinger or any other real policy-making conversations?

To call the President an "empty man" proves your emptiness. We expect a broader, fairer outlook from you.

HELEN BALLOU

West Nyack, N.Y.

A PR Job

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Your attractive presentation by Jude Wanniski in "When Did the President Know?" (May 3) in which Mr. Wanniski concludes, "This is why the President will not be impeached. He may not be 'innocent,' but he is a thousand times 'less guilty' than the people have imagined him to be." The extraordinary fallacy in this presentation is the assumption that all the evidence is in. But the House Judiciary Committee has already decided that these edited transcripts do not constitute complete evidence, and the special prosecutor realizes—and has said aloud—that in point of fact they are not evidence at all.

My God, Mr. Wanniski, it is as if in going into court, I as the defendant, were allowed to hand the prosecution its evidence: its source would be me, and I would have the opportunity to edit, to lose, to alter, to change whatever I wished. The term for this is "self-serving," which is what the Nixon transcripts are. And, since Mr. Wanniski must know this, then I must come to the conclusion that his presentation is self-serving, and in the same category as the transcripts: an elegant PR job, to use the sort of terms which Mr. Nixon employs.

PHILIP K. DICK

Fullerton, Calif.

The Real Nixon

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

The real Nixon, "P" of the transcripts, is an entirely different man from that portrayed by the press these many years. He is not ruthless, cunning and arrogant, but warm, patient and considerate. He's entangled in a web not of his own making but he struggles, sometimes almost fatalistically, to extricate himself and his friends.

I often have the feeling I am reading a Greek tragedy wherein the hero is doomed from the start. But then I remind myself that this is America and our conflicts end like "High Noon" not "Oedipus Rex."

JEANNE MCQUADE

Queens Village, N.Y.

Unbecoming

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

The headline over the article by reporters Falk and Landauer is most unbecoming of the Journal: "President's Innocence Is Not Exactly Proved by His Transcripts."

It sounds so strange because it is not necessary to "prove" one's innocence.

RUSSELL J. HILL

Cleveland

Two Views

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

Why didn't the President pick up the phone, call the FBI and have the malefactors arrested, as any good citizen would have done? By the way, what ever did happen to law and order?

JOHN TREYSTAIAN

Cambridge, Mass.

For the President to have picked up the phone on March 21, 1973, and called the police would have required a Stalin-like personality, a personality pleasing to prosecutors and editors but not to ordinary people. That we have a compassionate and human President would be apparent to anyone who can place himself in the position the President found himself.

RUTH STROJNY

Midland, Mich.

Marveling Reader

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

The text of the transcripts I read is one that reveals a President fully conversant with the subject matter under discussion and fully cooperative with his subordinates, sharing with them the task of "holding the cover." He is not one, as Mr. Wanniski observes, who stumbles "on revelation after revelation about Watergate."

And where, in this entire country, could Mr. Wanniski find another lawyer who needs to be tutored in the meaning of the phrase "obstruction of justice"?

DAVID E. ACKER

Bedford, Mass.

Justice for the President

Editor, *The Wall Street Journal*:

It is being asserted that President Nixon having lost command of power politics can no longer evade the operation of the laws of the land and the authority of the Congress. In the same vein, it might be said that the House Judiciary Committee, comprised entirely of lawyers, must follow the laws of the land and the rules of procedure in a legal and judicious manner, recognizing the rights and prerogatives of a President of the United States under the Constitution.

A President of the United States whose performance is otherwise commendable, even exemplary, is nevertheless expendable if it is determined as the Constitution mandates he has committed treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors. Conversely, a President whose performance is very poor cannot be removed in an impeachment proceeding if his conduct otherwise is unimpeachable.

Vice President Ford, who once stated that an impeachable offense is what the House of Representatives says it is, has recently restated the proposition that an impeachable offense is what Art. II, Sec. 4 of the Constitution specifically states.

Counsel for the President vigorously contend that this means only indictable crimes are impeachable offenses. Lawyers for the committee have taken the broader view of constitutional intent. That a President, so they say, who by derelictions of duty or deleterious conduct demonstrates unfitness or incapacity to continue to serve his countrymen should be impeached. So the problem of defining an impeachable offense remains unresolved, despite the learned discourse by legal scholars.

Moreover, it has never been judicially determined what quantum of evidence is required to impeach and convict a President in an impeachment proceeding. Is it the rule of fair preponderance of evidence as in civil cases; or, as in criminal prosecutions the doctrine of beyond a reasonable doubt? Or is some new principle of evidence pertinent to an impeachment proceeding to be enunciated; i.e., "reasonable certainty"?

These considerations which are baffling professors of constitutional law and law students pose justiciable issues arising under the Constitution for ultimate determination by the Supreme Court pursuant to Art. III, Sec. 2 thereof.

Without such clarification of the issues, the committee must proceed with the utmost caution prior to undertaking what is one of the most crucial legal proceedings in our nation's history. It ought not be induced into taking precipitous actions by the clamorings of editorial writers and commentators, or even the intensifying pressures of a predominant segment of the American people.

The verdicts in the Mitchell-Stans prosecutions should give pause for further reflection. That in our American jurisprudence an accused person is innocent until legally proven guilty. Hopefully, we will hear less now about the resignation of President Nixon and more about justice for the President.

JULES S. TOMKIN, J.D.

Chairman

Bar Council of New York

New York