

28 October 1973

Dear Harold:

In imperial China, from the most ancient times, the emperor was held to reign through the Mandate of Heaven. When dynasties were overthrown, either by popular rebellion or coups d'etat, the outgoing administration (whether anyone survived or not) was said to have lost the Mandate of Heaven. This is a typical Chinese euphemism for what we say more bluntly in our Declaration of Independence, that governments derive their just powers through the consent of the governed (maybe it's in the preamble to the Constitution, no matter). If that consent is withdrawn, out. You've blown your mandate, Mac. We acknowledge this idea came to us from British reformers, but what we fail to recognize is that its lineage can be traced back from the British to the French renaissance thinkers ( who wrecked the divine right of kings principle), who had absorbed it from the Jesuits who got into China following Marco Polo and who returned babbling about the advanced civilization they had found.

If it sounds preposterous to suggest that Richard Nixon has lost the Mandate of Heaven, I say it anyway because nothing better describes what seems to have happened. For the first time in 10 years, we have been watching and listening to newscasts and commentaries this past week and have not been consumed with frustration and disagreement with the cliches employed. There still is some of that, of course, but one cannot and perhaps should not have everything. It is enough that the veil of phony respect has been torn aside and that the emperor is beginning to be discussed fairly openly in realistic terms. The enclosed clipping from the Knight News Service is an excellent example. It is important because it was written for the Knight chain, and selected for use by a Hearst paper. Thus far have we come, anyway.

As I think about it now, the veil began dissolving a week ago Saturday, Oct. 20, when Nixon fired Cox and forced Richardson and Ruckelshaus to resign after his phony compromise offer about the tapes. The talk shows that weekend began to ring with demands for Nixon's resignation or impeachment. He was defying the law.....feared a full investigation which was coming too close. The demands became not only louder but more blunt on Thursday during the alert. Callers-in openly discussed the possibility of a takeover using the military. More than one likened the reason for the alert -- the alleged movement of Russian troops toward the Middle East -- to the Gulf of Tonkin incident and noted the reliance of both on vague intelligence reports which no one had any way of verifying. Disbelief was rampant and unconcealed. Then the Friday night press conference came along and the dam went out. The TV and radio commentators were relatively restrained, but the callers-in were not, and demands for impeachment became even more sharp and outspoken. We don't think Haig helped much today with his appearance on Face the Nation. He looked too much like a 1923 collar ad and parroted the WH line too faithfully, quite apart from lying just about every time he opened his head to evade another question. His smile was too ready and too closely resembled the pinned-back muscular leer the GL uses in place of the smile he is incapable of producing. Here is one militarist who realizes he has hitched his career to the wrong politician.

Even though we are by no means out of the woods, I feel better, much better. The people have found some long-suppressed quality of self-respect, I think. They are bitter. They feel they've been had, and the bitterest are those who gave Nixon his mandate. Friday and Saturday night they were calling KGO from as far away as LA, Montana, Washington, Oregon and British Columbia. Enough, they said, this man has got to go. They cited defiance of the law, the phony alert, the disastrous news conference. Some even touched upon the option available to precipitate another crisis at any time and declare martial law, dissolve Congress and suspend the Constitution. They cited the Marcos precedent among others. They spoke of the bloodbath this could involve and left no doubt they thought one would be involved.

Haig did his best, but he left me with the impression that his military mind, while fixed dutifully upon his obligation to his commander in chief (ask Mr. Ruckelshaus about that) still was ~~was~~ beginning to grapple with that nightmare of the militarist -- political responsibility. The troops will follow orders, of course, but then what? What general wants to clean up a blood bath? This is where the military bureaucrat draws the line, where his innate fear of the people begins rising. We'll see. It's still possible, a ~~xxxx~~ coup, but if I read Haig right it's less so than before the firestorm he now tries to say was a phrase used first by the media and not by himself. He strikes me as another Maxwell Taylor, who was a very decent guy as a young man but who turned out otherwise, I'm afraid.

As I say, for the first time since the JFK assassination we find people thinking and saying the right things now and then instead of mindlessly repeating the lies that have been fed to them. No one should understand that feeling better than you. It must mean something. Let's hope. Perhaps now we can. Love that Mandate of Heaven.

Best from us both,



jdw

P.S. -- Poison oak from cats? What a question to put to two people who have ALWAYS had at least two cats and who for the ~~past~~ past 25 years have lived in Mill Valley, well recognized as the poison oak capital of the galaxy. Yes, we really LIKE cats.