

Joseph Kraft

Book 12/1/74

Where Is the Conservative Outrage?

It's exit snarling once again for Richard Nixon. As he goes down, the President is spewing out libels about this country's national security apparatus which Pravda, on its worst day, would have blushed to publish.

In the process he is doing damage to vital national institutions. But where, one wonders, are the protests of the principled conservatives who ought to be mortally offended?

The freshest evidence of what the President is doing and thinking comes from Charles Colson, the former White House aide sentenced to a year in prison after copping a plea on charges growing out of the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist. Colson is now talking through a private investigator, Richard Bast.

But Colson's present stories have a detail about them which rings absolutely true. They fit the basic White House-cum-Henry Kissinger argument that Mr. Nixon is a peace-lover now being thwarted, not to say martyred, by hardliners. Moreover, honorable men in the White House, the Pentagon and the State Department report that the President is indeed thinking along the lines sketched out by Colson.

One feature of the Colson report is that Mr. Nixon believes the CIA launched the whole Watergate affair in order to get back at the President for cutting down the agency's clout.

"Mr. Nixon is spewing out libels about this country's national security apparatus . . . Where are the protests of the principled conservatives?"

"His theory," Colson told Bast about the President, "is that they were coming in (to the White House) to spy and they wanted to get enough on the White House so they could get what they wanted" in the way of bureaucratic recognition from the President.

According to Colson, the President's anger was especially directed against the present director of the agency, William Colby. Colson said that at one point the President was "going to remove the head of the CIA, bring his own people in, investigate internally and announce everything he had discovered to the American people."

In similar vein are accusations now launched about the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to Colson, the President was "systematically excluding the Central Intelligence Agency and the Joint Chiefs of Staff from a lot of foreign policy deliberations."

The chiefs, in Colson's version, moved to spy on the White House through the so-called Pentagon spy ring which surfaced when some Na-

tional Security Council documents were leaked to the columnist Jack Anderson. Mr. Nixon, according to Colson, would have prosecuted the chiefs except that he was afraid the military men would retaliate by leaking state secrets.

Colson said: "If he had tried to do anything about it, they (the Joint Chiefs) would have disclosed a lot of documents he was worried about protecting that they had been stealing, rifling from, (Henry) Kissinger's briefcase."

Now all of this is truly perfidious nonsense. I don't think Mr. Colby is a great man. But he is a very good bureaucratic manager, intelligent, responsible, resourceful and articulate. All his professional life he has been giving devoted and risky service to what he thought were the best interests of the United States.

Similarly with Adm. Thomas Moorer, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Nobody ever confused him with Horatio Nelson. But he is a truly loyal officer who wanted only to

serve his President. Now he is learning the high price of loyalty.

But it's not for me to defend the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Properly that should be the office of self-proclaimed conservatives. Attacks on the institutions of national security violate the first principles of the conservative creed.

So it would be nice to hear Barry Goldwater roaring treason about what the White House has been saying and thinking instead of attacking The Washington Post. It would be heartening to hear some conservative "thinkers" knocking the latest enemies list instead of picking on the House Judiciary Committee.

Unfortunately, and it is a true weakness for our country, principled conservatives hardly exist in the U.S. Those who glory in the conservative label, when they are not merely self-promoters, are usually only interested in balancing the budget or putting down unions.

With one exception. The Supreme Court remains an essentially conservative institution, elitist in composition and bound to care about respect for truth and order. And more and more it becomes clear that if this country is going to do the right thing in the case of Richard Nixon, if we are going to unload a President who has assaulted every canon of the political order, it will be thanks to the Supreme Court.