



Editorial Comment

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Watergate Glossary

WHETHER IT LIVES long in the annals or dies in infancy, L'Affaire Watergate has already made its indelible mark on the native tongue.

It has, for instance, minted the verb "to watergate," with its noun form "watergater" a welcome relief for the overburdened "skullduggery."

It has prompted the President, himself, to exhume a dead and buried Americanism in telling his Cabinet what he thinks of electronic surveillance in politics. He called it "incredible jackassery" in an apt and pointed choice of words.

A learned counsel for the defense has told the court that his client, an alleged bugger (using the word in its new, technical sense), may indeed have broken the law but had done nothing illegal. But a witness has informed the Grand Jury that the incredible jackassery was deliberately planned to provide former Attorney General Mitchell with "deniability."

And Martha Mitchell has notably freshened up a tired phrase in discussing what she previously labeled as "the little boys at the White House." She called them "God-BLESSED liars."

But the star performer in this linguistic hipodrome that Watergate spawned has been, logically enough, Ronald Ziegler, the President's press secretary. He has scintillated throughout by (a) promptly designating the incident as "a third rate alleged burglary attempt," (b) dismissing detailed reports as "irresponsible leaks of tidal wave proportions" and (c) berating the

naming of names as "reprehensible, unfortunate, unfair and incorrect."

But he has attained superstardom in informing the press that "major developments" had induced the President to back down from his strict construction of executive privilege (which Senator Ervin deemed "executive poppycock") and that he would now permit his staff members to talk to congressional committees. Queried about the President's early declarations of undying faith in the innocence of everybody in the administration, he said that the old statement was "inoperative" and that the new statement was "now the operative statement." Only an expert could find words like that to say the President changed his mind.

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AS A WATERGATE-STYLE phrase-maker, San Francisco's own Caspar "Cappy" Weinberger, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, has also shone. He has described Watergate as "essentially ephemeral"—a melodious but curious way of talking about a mess that has been getting messier for ten months, has begotten criminal trials and million dollar lawsuits, involves charges of bribery, conspiracy, burglary and bugging with intimations of sabotage and blackmail, has wrecked the career of Patrick Gray and has several others teetering.

But then, this is the same Watergate that Columnist Victor Lasky has neatly put down as "a few harmless pranks."