

Excuse Us, Can We Play Through

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A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Ziegler will cook up something. He's not going to admit that President Trustworthy was watching John Dean. Ziggy'll say that his boss was watching reruns of last year's Redskins football games. They pulled that once before when the hundreds of thousands came into Washington marching for peace. Ziggy put it out that he never peeked out the window, that he spent the afternoon looking at the game.

The war went on as it does yet and the marchers went away wondering what good it does. They had no way of knowing that inside that closed White House they were driving President Peaceful to war. The first report of what did indeed go on during those long days of demonstrations has had to wait for Dean to take the witness chair in front of Senator Sam and testify, "I was made aware of the President's strong feelings about even the smallest of demonstrations during the late winter of 1971 when the President happened to look out the windows of the residence of the White House and saw a lone man with a large 10-foot sign stretched out in front of Lafayette Park. Mr. Higby called me to his office to tell me of the President's displeasure with the sign in the park and told me that Mr. Haldeman (Higby's boss) said the sign had to come down."

One "lone man." The next time you see somebody carrying a sign by himself, don't sniff at his ineffectuality. Whoever that guy was, he got somewhere with his sign because, Dean says, "When I came out of Mr. Higby's office, I ran into Mr. Dwight Chapin (Nixon's appointment secretary and one of the first to creep away from his White House job) who said that he was going to get some 'thugs' to remove that man from Lafayette Park. He said it would take him a few hours, but they could do the job."

Some time before the Senate hearings are over, it would help to get Chapin up there under oath and ask him about this goon squad, but let's save our shock and indignation for a later time, and get some satisfaction out of Mr. Dean's narrative. He told us that the demonstrators were like an impetigo itch on Nixon's skin. Even on the trip to the Football Hall of Fame, they got to him: ". . . When the President arrived at the motel where he was spending the night in Akron . . . across the street were chanting, Vietcong-flag waving demonstrators. The President, after seeing the demonstrators, told the Secret Service agent beside him, in some rather blunt synonyms, to get the demonstrators out of there. The word was passed, but the demonstrators wouldn't be moved—much to the distress

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of the advance men who were responsible for the presidential trip . . . any means—legal or illegal—were authorized by Mr. Haldeman to deal with demonstrators when the President was traveling or appearing someplace.”

And when he was home, he was alone brooding about them: “. . . a climate of excessive concern over the political impact of demonstrators . . . an insatiable appetite for political intelligence . . . culminated with the creation of a covert intelligence operation . . . the strong feelings that the President and his staff had toward antiwar demonstrators . . . permeated much of the White House . . . the White House was continually seeking intelligence information about demonstration leaders and their supporters that would either discredit them personally or indicate that the demonstration was in fact sponsored by some foreign enemy.”

So, he was paying attention after all. He was paying attention and getting angrier and demanding the full force of the law be used against them, and when there was no remedy in law, because they'd done nothing unlawful, he went outside the law and caused crimes to be committed, and the crimes were committed, and

then they were covered up, and more crimes were committed, and then everything was exposed and it may end with that scurvy mob, those bums, the crud people trapping him into destroying himself.

Before each demonstration the people who weren't going on it used to ask, “What good does another march do?” Now you know. You can't know which march exactly, or which demonstration fixed him with the obsession that there had to be a hook-up between McGovern and the scragglies.

But Dean says, “. . . the information regarding demonstrators—or rather lack of information showing connections between the demonstration leaders and foreign government or major political figures—was often reported to a disbelieving and complaining White House staff.”

And if there was no information, they'd find it anyway, they'd beat up enough people, throw enough into jail, break into enough homes and offices and get the goods on the demonstrators when there were no goods to get. They got themselves instead, and the marchers and the protestors got 'em too. They marched out Haldeman and Ehrlichman and Mitchell and Kleindienst and Stans and Dean and all the lessers, and they've marched him back behind closed doors into secret places, marched him into confusion. But Ziggy Ron, you practice what you're going to say, and when you have it down, as you always do, come out from back of the blue curtains of your press rooms, and tell us he was playing golf.

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