

Nixon Pardon Causes Anger, Dismay

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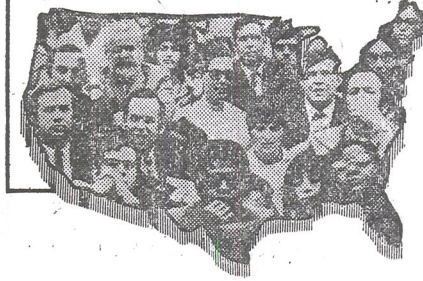
Patsy Cornell, a Spartanburg, S.C., housewife, thinks that Richard M. Nixon was "guilty of lying" about Watergate and, further, that he was "guilty of the whole thing, except for the original plan."

Lee Davis, a San Jose, Calif., newspaper executive, hopes that Mr. Nixon's pardon wasn't the result of a deal because "if there was, it's dirty politics again."

Homer Vandervelde, a Des Moines, Iowa, engineer thinks that the pardon was premature "because we have no idea of what was being pardoned."

What these three Americans have in common—other than being interviewed in a national voter survey in

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barometer precincts by The Washington Post—is that all of them voted to re-elect President Nixon in 1972. All like Gerald R. Ford as a man and hope he will do well as a President. And all of them are convinced that Mr. Ford's pardon was untimely, ill-advised and

detrimental to the best interests of the nation.

There is nothing exceptional about their attitudes. In conversation after conversation across America, voters who are Republican by preference and supporters of the President by inclination joined Democrats and independents in expressing their objections to President Ford's unconditional pardon.

If their reaction is any indication, Mr. Ford was making an understatement at his press conference last week when he said that the voter reaction "has created more antagonism than I anticipated."

In every region of the nation, including the South, an overwhelming majority of those interviewed thought Mr. Nixon was guilty of offenses ranging from "lying" to "obstruction of jus-

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tice." In every region also, these voters expressed anger, bewilderment and disappointment over Mr. Nixon's unexpected pardon as well as over the \$850,000 that President Ford had asked for his use during an 18-month transition period.

An Akron, Ohio, doctor, asked his reaction to the pardon, replied succinctly: "Nausea, chest pain and diarrhea."

A Manhattan advertising man and Nixon voter who lives in Plandome Heights, N.Y., couldn't believe what had happened. "I was astounded," he said. "I was sickened. You realize the country is really run by people you never see or hear who go on about their business."

Lorene Schultz, the wife of a Houston, Tex., construction worker, had a similar perspective.

"All the little ones go to the pen while he slips away to the nice house he's bought," she said. "I think that's terrible. What would they have done to you or me if we had evaded our income taxes for only a few hundred dollars?"

Mrs. Schultz, who leans toward Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace, expressed a theme shared by many when she said that Mr. Nixon had profited by his presidency and been pardoned while others are unforgiven and go to jail.

"It was bad enough that people today feel they can do anything and get away with it, without Ford reinforcing that feeling by pardoning Nixon," said Aline West, a retired college professor in Spartanburg. Asked about the \$850,000 transition payment, she added: "He disgraced the office, he shouldn't get its emoluments."

Several voters among the 158 interviewed said the pardon either was a bad example for the nation or a bad precedent for future Presidents. Some said it was unfair to the other defendants in the Watergate trials. A few specifically mentioned that John W. Dean III, the former White House counsel, was serving time in jail while Mr.

Nixon enjoyed the fruits of his pardon and his pension.

"If the other Watergate defendants go to jail, Nixon ought to go to jail," said Daral Haling, a 43-year-old Leavenworth, Kan., pipefitter. "If he's going to be turned loose, the rest should be turned loose."

Haling believes that the pardon was part of a "cut and dried deal" agreed to by Mr. Ford before Mr. Nixon resigned Aug. 9.

But the vast majority of voters interviewed said they did not believe—or preferred not to believe—that the pardon was the result of any deal.

Nor did most of the voters surveyed want Mr. Nixon to go to jail.

"Nixon's had enough punishment," said Mrs. George Billmeyer, wife of a Des Moines manufacturing representative. "He's been debased, disbarred and debilitated. What more could you do?"

(Mr. Nixon actually resigned from the California Bar Association, whose board of governors had been on the verge of recommending disbarment.)

Mrs. Billmeyer voted for Mr. Nixon all three times he ran for President and says he was "an intelligent man who lost his way." She thinks the other Watergate defendants, if convicted, should serve time in prison. Like most of those questioned she said she was "completely stunned" by the pardon.

The explanation which Mrs. Billmeyer tentatively came to accept was the one cited by many voters who were unsettled by the pardon but unwilling to criticize President Ford.

"I come from a medical family and the remark he made about the former President's health caught my eye," she said.

Several voters said they would think less harshly of the pardon if they knew that Mr. Nixon was seriously mentally or physically ill. Few respondents concluded that he was actually in critical condition, but many expressed some concern about Mr. Nixon's health.

What clearly offended most voters who objected to the pardon was the be-

lief that justice was denied by Mr. Ford's action.

"It was premature," said Vandervelde. His wife, listening to the inter-like it all."

"I think the country and the legislative branch should know what it is that had happened so that similar things won't happen again," said Vandervelde, who works for the federal government.

He also objected to the agreement reached by Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon that allows the former President to determine who has access to tapes and documents from his administration.

"Any letters that I write are the property of the government or the company I work for, Vandervelde said. "I wouldn't dream of pulling saying they belonged to me."

The \$850,000 appropriation Mr. Ford has requested for the transition also bothered many voters.

Jo Ryden, a doctor's wife in rural Tennessee, said of the money: "I think we should get Nixon off welfare." And a young salesman in Lexington, Mass., said:

"Every person is governed by laws. Why should someone in a slum get sent up for 35 years and he gets a pardon and an \$850,000 paycheck?"

Voter Survey

To try to find out what is on the minds of voters as they approach the November off-year elections, The Washington Post sent six reporters into 16 states in every region of the country. The reporters conducted 158 indepth interviews in 16 representative precincts selected by voter analyst Richard M. Scammon.

The interviewing was conducted by Post reporters David S. Broder, Lou Cannon, Stephen Isaacs, Peter Milius, Mary Russell and Jules Witcover. Researchers Patricia Davis and Elisabeth Donovan assisted in the survey.

This belief that Mr. Nixon should be governed by the same laws that others are subject to was widely shared.

In a poll conducted by the Roper Organization in late August before the pardon was issued, 78 per cent of those interviewed thought the charges against Mr. Nixon were "extremely" or "quite" serious. Forty-four per cent of the respondents thought that Mr. Nixon was "clearly guilty" and 38 per cent thought he was "probably guilty."

The Kansas City Star, interviewing 409 persons in Kansas and Missouri in a scientifically selected sample, found that 51 per cent disagreed with the pardon even though they favored Mr. Ford over Sen. Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) in a trial heat by 44 to 35 per cent.

A number of voters interviewed by The Post team said Kennedy was guilty of a "cover-up" of his own in the Chappaquidick drowning, and some linked it to the Nixon cover-up. The wife of the Akron doctor who said that the pardon gave him "nausea, chest pains and diarrhea" added: "And Ted Kennedy had the gall to say it seems a double standard."

What was most apparent from The Post interviews on the pardon, other than the opposition to it, was the attention that had been given to the issue by voters. Some who opposed the pardon and the transition payments thought that Mr. Nixon was entitled to control his tapes and documents.

Other who were sympathetic to the payment of the money or even to the pardon believed that it was important that the pardon believed that it was important that the tapes be turned over to the Department of Justice or kept in custody until a full Watergate report was issued.

Regina McKinney, a 27-year-old Des Moines math teacher who is expecting her first child, reacted to the pardon by saying that it was "not fair to the others but I believe it was an honest, moral decision by President Ford." She approved of Mr. Nixon's having control of the tapes and documents but believed that the amount of money re-

quested for the transition should be reduced to \$250,000.

Mrs. McKinney worked for the candidacy of Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.) and voted for him. Typifying the independence shown by voters in these interviews she says she likes Mr. Ford and will decide whether to vote for him in 1976 by the way he conducts himself in the presidency.

Many voters expressed sympathy for the former President, regardless of whether they agreed with the disposition of his case.

"I don't believe in tromping a man when he's down and out," said 79-year-old Chris Wyrick, a retired supervisor of a railroad freight office in Leavenworth. "A lot of my feeling would depend on what Nixon's condition actually is."

A manufacturer's representative Plandome Heights feels that Mr. Nixon was guilty of "a great many things but I don't know if he knows it or not. He's a real mixed-up guy."

As to equal justice, he said, "They're not ordinary citizens. Nobody gets treated as ordinary citizens unless they are. I don't think there's any way to avoid it."

A few of those surveyed even thought the Watergate defendants and sometimes Mr. Nixon had been treated worse than ordinary citizens.

"I believe it is political because the way our country is run, there are worse criminals running around," said a Plandome Heights management consultant. "Ninety-nine per cent of the people have been involved in cover-ups"

"There's a little bit of criminal in all of us," said a 25-year-old Des Moines salesman.

There were some who were not inclined to be forgiving to Mr. Nixon. One was Dan Cochetas, a 24-year-old senior math major at the University of Denver, one of 10 persons in The Post survey who was interviewed before the pardon.

Cochetas was opposed to any pardon. "I'm emotional on that," he said. "He condemned those who went to Canada so I think there should be no amnesty for him either."

A majority of respondents opposed amnesty for draft evaders and war resisters, although not as overwhelmingly as they disapproved of the pardon.

Julian-Burgess, a retired Spartanburg banker, thought that Mr. Nixon should get the \$850,000 because "they've taken everything away from him." He opposed amnesty: "If they can't fight for their country, they should stay where they are."

Leah Henry, a retired Air Force colonel who favored the pardon with the words "Ford acted as a human being" said she was for amnesty only on a case-by-case basis.

And Clement Driscoll, a 63-year-old retired St. Louis newspaperman, thought that both Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon were "crooks" because of the pardon and also opposed any amnesty.

"Deserters and draft evaders set bad examples," he said. "Let them stay where they are."

Most people said they didn't know whether there was any connection in President Ford's mind between his pardon of Mr. Nixon and his conditional amnesty program for draft evaders. Some made their own connections, on both sides of the question.

"President Ford has shown he's not willing to hold a grudge and that he's willing to forgive," said Merry Ann Trevillyan of Des Moines, the wife of an International Business Machines repairman. "I'm willing to forgive, too, providing the draft evaders do some kind of needed social work."

Mrs. Trevillyan, a 32-year-old Republican who would have preferred Ronald Regan to Nelson A. Rockefeller as Vice President, was forgiving in many other ways. In a typical response she said that she wanted, more urgently than any inflation control, for President Ford to "make peace on earth by the pardon of Mr. Nixon, for whom she had voted in 1972.

"I feel different ways about it," she said. "John Dean went to jail for telling the truth. Nixon didn't tell the truth and he didn't go to jail. Still, Ford showed a spirit of forgiveness and maybe that's right, too. Maybe Nixon's punishment is himself."