

Who Is Them?

By RUSSELL BAKER

John Mitchell, Attorney General and chief political strategist to the President of the United States, having drawn up the chief political strategy for the Presidential campaign of 1972 and sent it ahead to his chief, reported to the White House the other day to see how the chief liked it.

The President was ebullient in a reserved way.

"John," he said, "you've done it again, but—"

"Thank you, Mr. President."

"There is just one thing, John. I'm not quite sure I understand it."

Mr. Mitchell's merry eyes twinkled. "Well, Mr. President," he said, "I think it's fairly easy. We're going to hit them, and hit them again, and then hit them again and again. I hope you have still got a little of 'the old Nixon' left in you, Mr. President, because this is going to be your kind of campaign."

"The war issue, John. I don't quite see what you have in mind for handling the war issue."

"You hit them for letting the war drag on for four bloody years while our prisoners languish in North Vietnam. You hit them with charges that their imagination has failed, that they have no ideas. And then, Mr. President, you tell the voters that you know how to stop the war in Vietnam, and have a plan for ending it."

"John, if I say that, they're going to ask me what the plan is."

"Of course, they are, Mr. President. And you are going to say, 'I can't tell you what the plan is until I've been re-elected.'"

"I see. Now what is this about bureaucrats, John?"

"You're going to hit them with charges that they've created a vast, expensive, parasitic bureaucracy to direct a socialistic economic policy of state controls which . . ."

"John . . ."

" . . . controls which make a mockery of the great American tradition of free enterprise operating in a free market. Controls enforced by despicable Government bureaucrats, who even have the power to tell the working man how much money he can earn, and . . ."

"John, would you move ahead now? What is this about selling out the fourteen and a half million Chinese?"

"That takes you into China policy, Mr. President. You make a series of hard-hitting speeches charging that a reckless policy of flirtation with the atheistic Communists of mainland China constitutes a sellout of the four-

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teen and a half million Chinese on Taiwan. You can really make them wriggle when you hook them on that old China policy issue, Mr. President."

"I see, John. And the next thing you have here says 'soft on Communism.' What's that mean, John?"

"You're going to accuse them of softness on Communism, Mr. President, just like the old days. You're going to hit them for going to Red Communist Rumania and for dancing in the streets with the Red Rumanian boss. You're going to make mince-meat of them for going to Red Communist Peking and . . ."

"Supreme Court, John. You've got something here about the Supreme Court. What's that mean, John?"

"You're going to hit them there for letting America down on the most vital issue of our time, Mr. President. I'm speaking of school busing. You're going to hit them with responsibility for naming the Chief Justice who wrote the opinion upholding school busing. And you're going to tell them that the only way we can get this country turned around is by electing a President, like you, Mr. President, who will put men on the Court who can be relied on to stop this school busing."

"I see, John. And what is this item marked 'crime'?"

"You're going to hit them right in the breadbasket, Mr. President, for their failure, despite four long years in office, to make the streets safe for decent people to walk, for letting fear keep the American people sealed up in their homes after sundown when . . ."

"John. Just a minute, John. I want to say something. This would have been a brilliant campaign for me four years ago, but something has happened in the meantime, John."

"Really, Mr. President? What?"

"Them, John, are now us."

"Frankly, Mr. President, that had occurred to me. That the ideal campaign would be one in which we ran against ourselves, I mean. And why not, Mr. President, when you get right down to it? Look how easily General Thieu was re-elected by the simple expedient of running against himself."

"This is not Southeast Asia, John."

The two men sat silently for a long while, and finally Mr. Mitchell said, "Are you positive about that?"

Tom Wicker is on vacation. His column will be resumed at the end of this month.