

A Communication

Watergate: What Should Mr. Nixon Have Known?

On July 13, 1973, the Senate Watergate Committee took two steps to disengage itself from the notion that the ultimate question before it is "Did Mr. Nixon know about Watergate earlier than March 21, 1973, and if so, when, and what did he know?"

In a series of rhetorical questions addressed to Mr. Richard Moore, Senator Ervin brought out that within two months after the June 17, 1972, burglary, the news media had unearthed most of the facts about that incident, including the direct involvement of the President's re-election committees.

Senator Baker carried this wholesome disillusionment one step further, identifying the Ervin tactic as a doctrine of "constructive" knowledge, which admits as a valid factor the more sensible question, "what should the President have known?" or, as I would prefer to state it, "What must he have known?"

Thus, common sense seems about to displace a shopworn and untenable sophistry. No one but the President himself can say when he realized the extent of the fraud and deception that was being perpetrated in his name—and, from what moment on, by his silence, Mr. Nixon became a participant in the "cover-up."

Only the President can answer that question, and he has done so already: he has told us he didn't know anything really important or alarming until March 21, 1973. Since the Senate Committee clearly doesn't believe Mr. Nixon, it has spent much time trying to divine the presidential consciousness by asking all his erstwhile associ-

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ates what they know or think or "believe" the President knew about Watergate after June 17, 1972. The President obviously enjoys no more credibility than any of these other characters who worked for him.

Having adjusted our thinking to the more realistic question "what should he have known about Watergate?" let us take a new look at the concept of Watergate, itself.

"Watergate" is the symbol, the code name of a maze of cynically contrived violations of law; a tangled web of lies, frauds and deceptions which Mr. Nixon's administration, in most instances at his specific direction, has practiced on the American people during the

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whole period of his presidency. "Watergate" is the name of a pattern of treason, of the deliberate betrayal of the fundamental principles of honor, trust, probity and fair play on which our American experiment in republican democracy is based. "Watergate" differs as much in kind as it surpasses in magnitude any other scandal in our history. It is a subversion of the essence of Americanism.

If we confine our specifications to those deeds and expressions that are related to the presidential primaries and general election of 1972, we may properly associate with "Watergate" the following items:

- The sabotage, by fraud and hoax, of primary campaigns of Sens. Muskie, Humphrey, Jackson and others.

- The abortive attempt to bug and burglarize Senator McGovern's headquarters.

- The dairymen's deal, allegedly consummated with the President himself, whereby, for \$422,500 the dairymen negotiated a price adjustment permitting them to plunder millions from the public.

- The beautifully orchestrated offensive against the freedom of the press and other media—designed to discredit, cripple and, ultimately—I suppose—to silence that prestigious and unimpeachable minority of newspapers and the television networks which persisted in turning over the rocks and reporting what they found crawling around below.

- The infinitely sinister practice of politicizing and corrupting the CIA, the FBI, the SEC, the Internal Revenue Service—indeed, every agency of government whose integrity must be unimpeachable if we are to have any confidence whatever in our (?) government.

- The "plumbers" gang, set up at Mr. Nixon's acknowledged command, to commit illegal acts which the FBI refused to do, even in defiance of executive command.

- The utterly phony claim of "national security" as justification for all kinds of legal breaches. (Here Mr. Mitchell, though equally arrogant, is somewhat more honest than Mr. Nixon. The chief law officer of this "law and order" administration claims

another kind of "national security"—the re-election of Richard Nixon—as ample justification to break the law.)

- The not very subtle practice of strongarming, and extorting "gifts" to the Nixon re-election campaign from large corporations having important concerns with the federal government—some of these gifts being illegally taken out of corporate funds.

- The consistent practice of tampering with the courts, ranging all the way from the attempt to degrade the Supreme Court with Haynsworth and Carswell, to the phony persecutions of the Berrigans, the containment of charges against the "burglars" and the deferral of their trial, and the massive obstructions of justice in the Ellsberg matter.

- For good measure, let us add Vesco, ITT, Segretti, and Ronald Ziegler and his "inoperative" pronouncements.

We cannot afford to deceive ourselves, nor can we afford any longer the luxury of deceit by Mr. Nixon. The bottom and the top of Watergate is the character of Mr. Nixon. Watergate is the inevitable fruit of a character for whom the ends have always justified the means—a character unconstrained by any conviction of principle or purpose except to rise to a place where no one can "kick him around."

How ironical that six months after his greatest triumph, Richard Nixon is confronted at last with the opportunity to make one true and unmeasurable contribution to his country, by removing himself from the presidency.

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