

Vivid Give and Take In a Peaceful Setting

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Aug. 22 — When President Nixon was asked today how much of the "blame" he accepted for the "climate" that helped cause Watergate, he answered, "all" of it. But in the course of his long news conference, he invoked a long list of people to help explain, and justify, his current troubles—previous Presidents, former aides and, particularly, the press.

For his first news conference in more than five months the President chose an open-air forum, the sun-splashed bluffs of San Clemente overlooking the Pacific beaches where he likes to walk, seeking tranquility. But this idyllic spot offered

little peace for the President today: it apparently failed to lighten his mood of the last few weeks, which White House aides have described as "grim."

The President tried to turn the nation's attention away from Watergate, and opened the news conference with a long defense of his foreign policy. But as he was questioned repeatedly about the scandal his voice quavered noticeably, and he slurred and mispronounced several words, saying "well" instead of "wear" at one point.

Mr. Nixon tried to divert, he tried to banter, he tried to cajole, he tried to reprimand, but Watergate kept returning.

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But one of the most important facts about the news conference was that it was held at all. By meeting with the press, by letting them take their best shots and by standing up to them, the President was clearly trying to dispel the image that has developed recently of a brooding and reclusive man who felt he did not have to answer to anybody for his actions. Vice President Agnew drew applause for taking on his accusers squarely, and the President could win similar appreciation.

Recent weeks have seen the President's popularity plunge to 31 per cent in the Gallup Poll, the lowest rating for any President in 20 years.

After his Watergate speech last week, as many as two-thirds of the people questioned by pollsters said that in their opinion Mr. Nixon had not told the whole truth. (In a Gallup Poll reported today Mr. Nixon's popularity was given as 38 per cent.)

Strain Showed

In New Orleans on Monday, the strain showed. President Nixon was trying to make his way through a crowd toward a convention hall and found newsmen following him. With obvious anger he turned to his press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, gave him a shove, and told him to get rid of the reporters.

Yesterday, the deputy press secretary, Gerald L. Warren, conceded that in the last few months there had been "periods of pressure" for the President. And today, in answering another question, Mr. Nixon noted that he had "blown my stack" at Mr. Ziegler.

White House newsmen, for their part, were just as combative as the President. One implied that Mr. Nixon had failed to "execute the laws" and asked the President whether anyone who did that should be impeached. Another question seemed to presume that Mr. Nixon had failed to provide "moral leadership."

But the President warded off these jabs and swung back. In reply to the first question, about why the President had made tapes of his private conversations, Mr. Nixon launched into a description of how previous Presidents had established a "taping capacity" to provide an "accurate record" of their Administrations.



Associated Press

Edwin M. Gaudet between state and U.S. officers after surrender at Arroyo Hondo, N. M.

Later, the President asserted that burglaries for national security purposes had been authorized "on a very large scale" by Presidents Johnson and Kennedy. Wire-tapping, he said, had reached its peak when Robert F. Kennedy was Attorney General. But "there was no talk of impeachment" then, he added acidly.

As he was pressed for further explanation of why he failed to act on Watergate for so long, the President reiterated that he had trusted his former counsel, John W. Dean 3d, when Mr. Dean told him that no White House aides had been involved in the affair.

'Regret' Expressed

He conceded that he had failed to press John N. Mitchell, the former Attorney General, for the facts in the matter, and he said that he "regretted" Mr. Mitchell's decision not to tell him. But the responsibility, he was clearly saying, rested with his former aide, not with himself.

The President reserved his harshest criticism for the press. He was so combative with newsmen, and so assertive of his own Presidential prerogatives, that one reporter characterized his message this way: "You will have Nixon to kick around for another three and a half years."

Eleven years ago, after losing his bid to become Governor of California, Mr. Nixon held a famous news conference in which he assailed the press and told them, "You won't have Nixon to kick around any more."

But if newsmen bristled at the attack, Mr. Nixon was clearly aiming his remarks over their heads, directly at the national television and radio audience. He was hoping, it seemed, to score points with the public for forthrightness and strength, and perhaps to undercut the credibility of the newsmen who have been increasingly critical of his administration.

For instance, when Dan Rather of C.B.S. said he wanted to state his question with "due respect" to the office of the President, Mr. Nixon shot back, "That would be

unusual." The President smiled—but few newsmen thought he meant the conciliatory gesture.

At another point, the President conceded that Watergate had raised questions about his "capacity to govern," but he placed the blame squarely on reporters, not his Administration. As he put it: "To be under a constant barrage, 12 to 15 minutes a night on each of the three major networks for four months, tends to raise some questions in the people's mind with regard to the President and it may raise some questions with regard to the capacity to govern."

Another questioner tried to break in, but the President's voice took on a shrill tenseness as he brushed the reporter aside and added:

"We have had 30 minutes of this press conference. I have yet to have, for example, one question on the business of the people, which shows you how we are consumed with this. I am not criticizing the members of the press because you naturally are very interested in this issue, but let me tell you years from now people are going to perhaps be interested in what happened in terms of the efforts of the United States to build a structure of peace in the world."

'Where the Shoe Fits'

As the news conference progressed, the President's anger at those he perceives to be his adversaries seemed to grow. When he was asked who specifically was trying to "exploit" Watergate to wound him politically, the President shot back:

"I would suggest that where the shoe fits, people should wear it. I would think that some political figures, some members of the press, perhaps some members of the television, perhaps would exploit it."

"Most" members of the press corps, he went on, "were not enthusiastic" about his election in either 1968 or 1972. And many of them, he said, "would prefer that I fail," but "I am not going to fail," he asserted. "I am here to do a job and I am going to do the best I can."