



U.S. Must Accept Nixon's Challenge

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THE TRUE character of the President's defense was reasserted last week with the White House statement on the case involving the International Telephone & Telegraph Corp. and the Associated Milk Producers. In each the President acknowledged responsibility but refused blame.

In the ITT matter, Mr. Nixon admitted that he had intervened through high Justice Department officials to discourage prosecution of an antitrust case. Mr. Nixon claims that his intervention was innocent, merely a matter of the President wanting "the Attorney General to see that his antitrust policy was carried out."

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BUT IF the intervention by the President was so innocent, why did two of the highest officials in his administration lie to a congressional committee when questioned about Mr. Nixon's role? Why did Attorney General John Mitchell and Attorney General - designate Richard Kleindienst tell the Senate Judiciary Committee that the President had not intervened in the ITT case?

The almost certain answer is that the two Justice Department officials were trying to protect Mr. Nixon. But from what? Judging by inner White House memos and the case of the lobbyist Dita Beard, it is hard to rule out the ITT offer of money to hold the Republican convention in San Diego.

Similarly with Mr. Nixon's defense in the milk producers case. He acknowledges important contributions from the dairy-men which were brought to his attention in internal White House memos. He also admits that he met with representatives of the milk producers at the White House

on the morning of March 23, 1971. He acknowledges that on the afternoon of March 23 he ordered an increase in the milk - support price.

Mr. Nixon claims this decision was also an innocent one, unconnected with the milk producers' campaign contributions. He asserts that he was mainly acting under pressure from Democratic Senators and congressmen who were holding a legislative gun to his head.

But if so, why did the milk producers act as though they had something to hide?

The defense thrown up in the ITT and milk producers cases is only the latest example of the same brazen tactic. Time after time, Mr. Nixon has acknowledged responsibilities with stories that hold together only as hedges against criminal prosecution.

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THUS he acknowledged that he played a part in trying to get the Central Intelligence Agency to cover up the original Watergate burglary, but that it was for national security reasons. He admits that he took some fishy tax deductions for personal papers, but that it was at the suggestion of Lyndon Johnson. He also concedes that he and his secretary, Rose Mary Woods, played a part in the erasure of a critical section of a critical tape — but that, of course, was accidental.

The country has to accept the challenge. The whole fate of Watergate now rests with what emerges from the investigation by the House Judiciary Committee considering impeachment, and the inquiry and trials being brought by the Watergate special prosecution. There is no reason for anyone to flinch from these operations.