

## Dragging Out Watergate

President Nixon has persistently charged that the House Judiciary Committee is guilty of "fishing expeditions" in its request for tapes and documents needed for the impeachment inquiry. In reality, it is Mr. Nixon who is fishing—for time. His is clearly a strategy of delay, for which he endeavors to shift all the blame to Congress. This strategy is once again illustrated by James D. St. Clair, the President's lawyer, in telling the Judiciary Committee that the White House will not be ready before April 22 to furnish some of the requested materials.

While asking for further delay, the letter implies that John M. Doar, the committee's special counsel, will certainly not get all the sought-for tapes and documents. The phrasing of the message suggests that Congress will be given only what the White House deems necessary, with the probability of further confrontation and further delay.

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A chronicle of Presidential statements would indicate that the President was doing everything possible to expedite matters:

On January 30, Mr. Nixon told Congress in his State of the Union address: "I believe the time has come to bring this investigation and the other investigations of this matter to an end. One year of Watergate is enough."

On February 25, Mr. Nixon told a news conference: "Whatever is eventually arranged which will bring a prompt resolution of this matter I will cooperate in."

On March 25, Presidential press secretary Ronald Ziegler suggested that the committee's staff "should perhaps work late into the evening" to get the inquiry over with.

On March 20, Mr. Nixon said in a televised news conference in Houston: "... dragging out Watergate drags down America, and I want to bring it to a conclusion as quickly as I can."

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Such protestations of White House impatience have been followed regularly by a variety of qualifying statements, always indicating that, in the final analysis, Mr. Nixon considered it his prerogative to define the nature of the documents which the investigators or the committee should be entitled to receive—thus ensuring delay. Mr. Nixon claims that his decisions to withhold some tapes or documents are guided solely by his desire to protect the Presidency; but it should be obvious by now that the Presidency—if not the President—is best protected by an end to such sparring, and to hackneyed—but time-consuming—lawyers' maneuvers.

As the familiar scenario is repeated, Mr. Nixon accompanies his pleas for a speedy end to Watergate with a game plan of Presidential campaigning—from the convention halls of Texas and Chicago to the boulevards of Paris and the streets of Michigan. The inescapable conclusion is that the delaying actions are deliberate, while the charge that Congress is dragging its feet reflects Mr. Nixon's normal tendency to blame others for anything that goes—or looks—wrong.

However clever such a game plan may seem, it ought not deceive the American people nor deflect Congress from its duty to proceed in its impeachment inquiry without compromise and with all deliberate speed.