

## A Private Interview

# What Nixon Thinks of Watergate

San Clemente

President Nixon, terming Watergate "the thinnest scandal in American history," says that if the charges against him were true, "I wouldn't serve for one minute."

The President's comments were made in a broad-ranging interview with Rabbi Baruch Korff, a Nixon supporter from Providence, R.I. in the interview, recorded at the White House on May 13, Mr. Nixon said:

"I wouldn't serve for one minute if they were true. But I know they are not true and therefore, I will stay here, do the job that I was elected to do as well as I can and trust to the American constitutional process to make the final verdict."

The interview with Rabbi

Korff, chairman of the National Citizens' Committee for Fairness to the Presidency, Inc., was published yesterday in a paperback volume called, "The Personal Nixon: Staying on the Summit."

Royalties from the book, written by the rabbi, will go to the committee, Rabbi Korff said. The rabbi met with the President yesterday to give him a copy of the book.

In assessing the historical impact of Watergate, Mr. Nixon told Rabbi Korff that he considered it "the broadest but the thinnest scandal in American history."

He went on: "When they say this is like Teapot Dome, that is comparing apples with oranges, and shall we say, rather poor oranges, too."

The President expressed the opinion that if he "had bugged out of Vietnam," which he said the news media advocated, "Watergate would have been a blip. They wouldn't have cared,

but it is because I have not gone down the line with

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them that they care."

President Nixon last met with the White House press corps on March 6, and held question-and-answer sessions with a Chicago businessman's club and the National Association of Broadcasters later that month. He also was interviewed by columnist James L. Kilpatrick on May 14.

When asked why the Pres-

ident granted the interview with Rabbi Korff, deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said, "The rabbi requested it for his book and the President agreed to do it." Warren added that Mr. Nixon felt the interview would be useful to Rabbi Korff's effort.

Mr. Nixon contended that the great majority of those who have analyzed the White House-edited Watergate tapes "say they don't

find an impeachable offense, but they don't like their tone."

He added: "Well, I can say that if they were to tape the conversations of Presidents that I have known, they wouldn't like their tone, either."

The President also said he had no apologies for having given "the benefit of the doubt" to former aide John D. Ehrlichman and his former staff chief, H.R. Halde- man, in the weeks before they resigned from the White House staff on April 30, 1973.

"It was like asking me to cut off one arm and then another to have these two men leave," he said, adding that he reluctantly accepted their resignations only when it became apparent their usefulness as staff aides had been impaired.

Rabbi Korff asked Mr.

Nixon about reports that some of his taped conversations contained anti-Semitic remarks.

Mr. Nixon responded by listing Jewish members of his administration, including Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, and saying, "The point is the actions give lie to the fabricated words."

"Let me tell you, many of the so-called Eastern elite objected to his appointment. They didn't say it was because he was Jewish, but deep down that was the reason some of them objected. I can assure you, too, that the appointment of Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State was strongly opposed, despite his brilliance."

Forty-five of the book's 124 pages are devoted to the Nixon interview, with eight pages containing a brief interview with Vice President Gerald Ford and the remainder a recap of Mr. Nixon's career and an assessment by Rabbi Korff of Watergate and its impact.

Some of Mr. Nixon's strongest words were directed at the news media. Speaking of "my friends in the press room" he said:

"They are consumed by this (Watergate) issue, and I can see — not all but I can see in the eyes of them, not only their hatred but their frustration, and as a matter of fact, I really feel sorry for them in a way because . . . they should recognize that to the extent that they allow their own hatreds to consume them, they will lose the rationality which is the mark of a civilized man."

Asked if he felt there had been "a wholesale smear of the President's men in the Watergate affair," Mr. Nixon said he respected prosecutor Leon Jaworski very much but resented some of the activities "of some of his eager-beaver staffers."

"If these activities, the kind of tactics that have been used, the harassment

of secretaries and stenographers and people who can't afford lawyers, and so forth, hours and hours of drilling and questioning and threatening and all the rest, if these tactics had been used

in the day of (the late Senator Joseph R.) McCarthy, he would have been ridden out of town on a rail.

"I believe that when it is all sorted out in the end, it will be found that there has been harassment on a massive basis of innocent people, that many without guilt have had their reputations badly damaged, and I fear, too, that it will be found that many who have been charged with guilt have been charged on flimsy indictments."

In this connection he cited the acquittal earlier this year in a federal court in New York of former Attorney General John N. Mitchell and former Commerce Secretary Maurice Stans.

Rabbi Korff later submitted additional written questions to Mr. Nixon which were responded to on May 29. In one written reply, Mr. Nixon said of impeachment:

"I think the American people want their congressmen to do the right thing here, not the political thing; and I think the best politics for members of Congress of either party, will be to vote their conscience, to vote the evidence, and not to vote the polls; and I trust they will do so."

In the interview, Mr. Nixon said:

"I must fight the impeachment, and I must, of course, as everybody knows, refuse to resign . . . If I did not fight the impeachment as it comes before the House in some form or other, I would leave to my successor, be he Democrat or Republican, not just the next one, but for all time to come, a precedent of a man mortally weakened from this process of destroying a president who was not guilty of a high crime or misdemeanor. If that were to succeed, this office will never then have the strong president that is needed here."

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