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Himself

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The Turn-Off

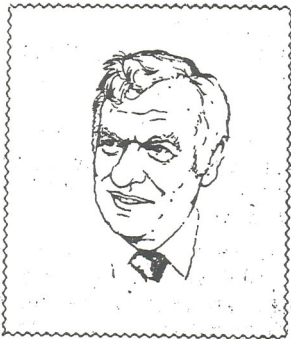
A RECENT SURVEY has concluded that eight out of every ten Americans believe the government, political and civic leaders in the nation "don't tell us the truth."

The poll, consisting of 45-minute personal interviews with more than 4000 persons throughout last November and December, was designed and supervised by Duke University political scientist Walter DeVries.

The survey revealed a broad distrust among all Americans, including the affluent and the educated, toward nearly all our institutions. The only profession to get a favorable majority was medicine, with 54 per cent.

Getting less than half-approval were priests and ministers, the Supreme Court, the military public schools the presidency and all legislators. Lawyers, with a meager 21 per cent approval, were followed only by the AFL-CIO (16 per cent) and the major oil companies (7 per cent.)

In short, Mr. and Mrs. Suburbia are beginning to think and feel like the young, the poor and the minority groups of this country. While the young, the poor, etc., continue to think as they traditionally have, only maybe a bit more so.



NOBODY TALKS about pie in the sky, by and by, anymore. All of this one could sense and guess; but this particular survey gives meat to some gloomy suspicions. The man who supervised it called the results "alarming and depressing because the distrust and alienation was across the board, affecting virtually every institution and population group."

Why this great turn-off? Why are we no longer able to grant that willing suspension of disbelief that is said to be essential for the staging of drama or of tragedy? Why are people in increasing numbers simply choosing not to vote, as their only form of political expression?

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THE CRITICAL intelligence tends to fight the obvious as an explanation, to skirt the cliché even when it is patently true. The current crisis of credulity with government has been caused by a lot of things done over a long period of time. But surely the proximate causes of this credulity crisis have been Nixon's Watergate and Ford's Pardon.

It is possible that Ford's Pardon was really Richard Nixon's too. I have expressed the view that in some way the former President was holding a gun to the head of his successor in the days before the infamous pardon was granted. Like, a taped promise by Mr. Ford to do what he was later forced to do.

Those eight out of ten Americans who feel they are not being told the truth have the feeling that they have been and are being manipulated, though all of them might not put it this way. I, for one, felt almost as if I had been spat upon when the estimable felon, Mr. John Ehrlichman, announced that, pending appeal, he was going to do his own "personal penance" as a voluntary legal aide to a community of Pueblo Indians in New Mexico. (I have not heard any thrilled announcements from the Pueblo Indians for this bounty.)

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IT IS ENTIRELY possible that Mr. Ehrlichman does feel honestly that he should do what he announced he would do. It is just that the arrogance, the condescension, the bad taste and the stupidity of such a move, just after the man had been given a stiff jail sentence, was typical of the whole mood and tone of the Nixon crowd. Mr. Ehrlichman is the guy who fought under the gallant banner of "Will it play in Peoria?"

Well, it isn't playing in Peoria. The head knave has not been brought to justice and never will be. The sub-knaves have been getting stiff sentences from Judge John Sirica, followed by quick and sudden releases. John Dean, in for four years, got out in less than four months. Can John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman and Ehrlichman be far behind?