

20 August 1973

Dear Harold:

If we've been poor correspondents recently it's because since the hearings recessed we've been trying to get caught up a bit both inside and outside the house. In the meantime we've tried to send along anything from the local papers which might provide a crumb of information you might not otherwise see. We've tried to keep it to a minimum, knowing the tremendous amount of stuff you're already handling and that you're trying to write at the same time. Several days ago we sent a large envelope along which included an issue of Ramparts. It appeared to have several stories which might be of interest to you.

On Agnew's miseries, we always return to our first reaction, which was that the investigation of his affairs could not have been developed without at least the assent of this administration. GL's precise motives still aren't clear, but it seems safe to postulate that if Agnew has been his insurance against assassination he now can serve as the same sort of insurance to discourage impeachment. Not that I expect that to happen, but the possibility may loom larger in certain minds than it ~~does~~ does in mine.

The same factor -- the necessity of at least assent -- was present in Butterfield's disclosure of the ~~the~~ existence of the tapes. Disclosure was necessary in order to counter Dean's accusations through Haldeman, and to open up the possibility of invoking Jencks-Brady to get all the WH hands off without long-term imprisonment and available later on when things cool down, if they ever do.

Incidentally, I suppose you noticed that Haldeman said he had the tapes in his possession for at least 48 hours or thereabouts, in any case for two nights. Due to his well-known home movie addiction, he's no doubt an experienced cutter and splicer, and easily could have cut unwanted portions from the tapes even if he had no expert help, such as Al Wong of the Secret Service. As I understand it, it is comparatively easy to edit such tapes and do it without danger of detection by the inexpert listener. I've heard one real expert claim that it is virtually impossible for a genuine expert to be fooled, however, if he has the right equipment to detect small changes in background levels etc.

On the whole I agree with you that Nixon really has little choice but to tough it out and fight it out, and that, as you put it, counterattack is his natural method. With Congress in no mood to impeach, it thus promises to become an extended contest of wills and stamina, and such a contest can be greatly influenced by other developments such as inflation, and possible foreign emergencies either real or fabricated. Nixon's apparent hope, therefore, must be to fight it out, delay as much as possible in the courts, and hope to last until 1976 when he can dust off his plans to take over by proclamation, meanwhile gradually rehiring such characters as Haldeman and Ehrlichman, both of whom act as though they were still on the White House payroll. The paper plans are intact, some of them still in effect actually. We do not believe Nixon can stand the thought of resigning -- it's just unthinkable to him in any realistic sense -- and he's gambling that Congress never will bring itself to impeach him.

There's a factor operating with both Haldeman and Ehrlichman which no one has dealt with, although the fact that both are Christian Scientists has been mentioned often. No one is willing to discuss the effect of a religion, of course. However, unless one has had direct experience with this particular breed there is no way of realizing the peculiar facility it imparts to some personalities wherein it enables them to believe, absolutely, in anything they want to believe. This is not always the case but in the aggressive type it often is literally true. Just as the Jesuits used to justify everything in their particular way, so do those Christian Scientists where their particular system of ~~kr~~ rationalization ~~re~~ proves to be vitally handy. Ehrlichman's wrath at Congressional drunks is a sure sign that he's using the system to help justify his own actions. Haldeman is a deeper problem -- he's wise enough to lay off the moralizing -- but his singleminded purpose is again an indication that this peculiar system of belief has contributed to his total dynamic. In these two cases, anyway, "Gott mit uns" didn't die with the last Hohenzollern.

How about the others who weren't helped along by their particular religious beliefs? The GL, as Herb Caen points out in the enclosed column quoting Eleanor Roosevelt, has no belief in anything, so he is unencumbered in that sense. He goes after what he wants for himself without the aid of any system of thought. But the others: I like von Hoffman's phrase of corporate Stalinism, the ideology of the big business firm, exacerbated by the huge and often internally contradictory demands of the conglomerate, wherein absolutist rule is the only feasible solution, with underlings expected to obey without question and even to take the blame for the mistakes of their superiors in the name of personal or team loyalty. This was transplanted to the WH in the name of a business administration (for which read Byzantium am Potomac), again as the only viable solution to the problems of getting anything done in an atmosphere of secrecy, grandiose schemes and the ever-present paranoia. The total amorality borrowed at the same time from business (most of our laws, I suspect, are aimed at trying to get business to behave itself) was perhaps the fatal defect in the whole system, for it was the gutter morality of advertising and the PR agent, perhaps the very worst form of the dubious morals of competitive business, which led to the excesses, the mistakes, the ghastly contradictions between the professions and the actual practices of the administration.

I'm taking this backward look at what I consider to be the origins of WG et al because this background provides the soil from which any real opposition to Nixon must come. In other words, he is a product and extension of the system which now must decide whether to condemn him and, eventually, toss him out. This leaves us with a state of affairs which he recognizes and on which he is basing his strategy and tactics. That he is reacting systematically is indicated by this morning's report of the alleged assassination plot in New Orleans (which the cops said they'd known about for a week). It was inevitable that at some stage or other he would use such a ploy in an effort to regain his image as a dramatic figure, and the fact that it's trotted out now suggests that it was brought on by the way Checkers III landed with a dull thud on Aug. 15.

(Harry Jupiter, an old AP colleague now on the Chronicle, turned in probably the best sample reaction to that speech to Herb Caen. Harry was sampling reaction to the speech in a Mission St. bar while it was still in progress. He saw a woman nodding and smiling as Nixon spoke, and asked if he could take her picture. Her husband answered for her: "I think not. My wife loves Nixon but she don't understand English too good.")

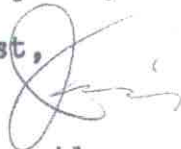
In other words, the speech, which already was toned down to a second Checkers rerun simply because he could not afford to discuss anything in detail because of the questions details would raise, satisfied no one but those already satisfied with GL, so to recoup, the assassination plot was dusted off. One wonders if the entry used was one contributed originally by E. Howard Hunt.

Returning to the question of Agnew, several recent references to Kissinger becoming Secretary of State within a month or six weeks (or after the Colson, Young and possibly Hunt testimony is got out of the way) suggests that something will have to be arranged for Bill Rogers. Note the enclosed Examiner clipping on the 25th Amendment, which gives Nixon the authority to appoint a successor to the vice president should that worthy resign. In this light, Agnew may find he has no choice but to resign, which would enable Nixon to appoint Rogers to succeed Agnew and move Kissinger into the State Department. Henry might go for it because he wants to get out of the WH and away from Watergate. Nothing basically would be disturbed, the stalemate could continue indefinitely, and plans for 1976 gradually could be revitalized as we all ride bravely forward together into the future and/or sunset. If worst comes to worst and public outrage forces the system to demand Nixon's own resignation, it can be done less uncomfortably with Rogers waiting in the wings than with Agnew, simply because W Rogers is more reliable from Nixon's standpoint. Viewed from any standpoint, including Nixon's, Rogers is a more presentable candidate to replace Agnew than anyone else we've been able to think of. If worst does not come to worst, Nixon can hang on, with Rogers, presumably with less fear of being knifed in the back than he could with Agnew remaining as vice president.

All in all, the attempted assassination ploy is probably a very accurate index to how low Nixon thinks his status has fallen in the public esteem, but it does not mean he sees any course open to him except to keep on toughing it out. It's a low key beginning along another of his imitative tactical ventures, and if he thinks it is useful the next one might be a little more exciting, but not much.

We join you in looking forward, etc, etc. etc.

Best,



jdw