

Fuller column filed Watergate.

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Watergate Recalls Nuremberg Trials

— Joseph Alsop

IT IS DREADFUL that here in America, we should have to think about the Nuremberg trials. But this is one dreadful result of the dreadful system that formerly prevailed in President Nixon's White House.

It is time to think about the trials, because of the plea that the Nazi leaders vainly made at Nuremberg. In brief, they said that they were free of guilt for all that they had done, because they had been servants of the German state. They had to plead they were only obeying the orders of their master Hitler, quite simply because it was the only plea they could make.

This grim precedent is now relevant to the Watergate horror. Obedience to the President of the United States is the only plea the more highly placed Watergate defendants can make, if the facts against them are proven. In that event their sole defense will be to say, "We acted on the President's orders."

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THIS FACT is most important to note for two reasons. On the one hand, it is actually against the highly placed defendants' interests to sacrifice their chance of making this plea of "orders from the President." What is against interest, is always credible. So they have to be believed if they say, instead, "The President knew nothing and ordered nothing."

On the other hand, the course of events has already been affected by the more highly placed defendants' practical interest in accusing the President. Specifically, this has plainly affected the way the President has handled the five men whose mere accusation — whether true or false

— can be automatically fatal to him. These five are the former Attorney General, John Mitchell; the Republican bagman, Maurice Stans; and the three top men of the former White House staff, H. R. Haldeman, John Ehrlichman and Charles Colson.

If guilty, all these men can mainly help themselves by involving the President. If angry and revengeful, they can destroy him. Hence it has been dangerous for the President to deal too harshly with these men.

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ASSUMING the guilt of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and the others can be proven in court, there are only two ways to read these facts. Either the President is just as guilty as his subordinates. Or he now fears his former subordinates, because he knows they can destroy him — as indeed they can — by falsely swearing that he gave orders for all they did.

At any rate, there are now three thoughts to hold, as the preachers would say. First, it is against interest for the key men accused to clear the President of guilt. Second, they must therefore be believed if they say on oath that the President was guiltless. And third, the **National Interest** urgently demands an immediate answer to the fundamental question about the President's guilt or guiltlessness.

The national interest could be promptly served in the current Senate investigation, by Senator Sam Ervin and his chief counsel, Sam Dash if they put the five key men on an oath immediately, and asked them the key question.