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Conservatives' Anger Rising on Watergate

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One of the most curious features in that cavern of curiosity, the Watergate affair, is the attitude of the right wing of American politics. Republicans and conservatives have been far more vociferous than anybody else in condemning the attitude of the White House.

For once, accordingly, the President will find it very hard to rally support by blaming his troubles on the Eastern establishment press. If anything, political benefits of the very highest kind

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are apt to accrue to a Republican leader prepared to catch the winds of conservative hostility to the Watergate affair.

Perhaps the best indication of the thunder on the right comes from newspaper commentators. Consider, for example, the conservative columnist James Kilpatrick. On Martin Agronsky's television show last weekend, Mr. Kilpatrick burst out with a cry from the heart. "I am so sick about this whole thing," he said of the Watergate affair.

Another good example is Vermont Royster, the former editor of the Wall Street Journal. Here are some excerpts from a column he wrote on Watergate the other day:

"The Watergate affair is no longer an amusing caper which the administration can lightly brush aside. . . The White House has bungled things. . . The White House muffed one opportunity after another to clear the air."

Then there is Ralph de Toledano, a biographer of Mr. Nixon with close ties to the White House. This is what Mr. de Toledano said the other day in a recent column about relations between Dwight Chapin, a former White House aide, and H. R. Haldeman, the President's top assistant for administration:

"In the widening investigation of the Watergate case, the involvement of White House chief of staff H. R. (Bob) Haldeman becomes increasingly apparent. The participation of Dwight Chapin, the President's appointments secretary, in the shenanigans which include the bugging of Democratic headquarters forbids any other conclusion. For Chapin was entirely the creature of Haldeman and would under no circumstance have embarked on any course of action without his mentor's knowledge and permission."

A conservative streak also distinguishes the figures in the Watergate affair who have done most damage to the administration. John Sirica, the federal judge who repeatedly expressed doubt about the veracity of witnesses and defendants during the trial in his court, is a Republican appointment who worked for a conservative law firm after graduating from the Georgetown Law School.

Then there is James McCord, the former CIA agent and security chief of the Republican campaign who was apprehended in the Watergate break-in. Mr. McCord is now spilling the beans about efforts to mask what happened from the FBI, the Justice Department, Judge Sirica and the public.

But Mr. McCord is no romantic cloak-and-dagger adventurer. His job at the CIA was to make sure that American diplomatic installations abroad were proof against entry or bugging. He's a steady, middle-class professional with a thing about Communists.

Lastly, there are the two men most responsible for pushing the investigation in the special Watergate inquiry set up by the Senate. One is Sam Ervin, the conservative former judge of North Carolina whom the President called "a great constitutional lawyer." The other is Lowell Weicker, an orthodox Connecticut Republican from an oldline GOP family, who is so appalled by what he has seen that he has developed an investigative effort of his own.

That conservatives should be particularly outraged by Watergate is easy to understand. They set tremendous store by principled government and the maintenance of law and order. But what Watergate discloses, at the very peak of authority in this country, is an

insensitivity to principle—a moral vacuum. That fact now has tremendous political implications. It denies to President Nixon the use of his favor-

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ite, divisive tactic. Since his main opposition on Watergate comes from the right, he cannot hope to rally the silent majority by his usual attack on the liberal establishment.

On the contrary, an enormous constituency—the constituency that truly cares about morality in government—has been put up for grabs by the Watergate affair. A principled Republican of honesty and brains who played Watergate straight could be projected by the investigation to the very forefront of presidential politics.