

# 'Middletown' Ignores Watergate

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MUNCIE, Ind., April 24—The sun has been shining on Muncie for the last two days and, after a spring plagued by rain, that seems to surprise and interest folks here more than the daily revelations about the Watergate scandal emerging from the nation's capital.

The red tulips are blooming around the old white brick city hall on Jackson Street. Dandelions are popping on lawns all over town. And while the Watergate may be a conversational hors d'oeuvre on that Georgetown cocktail circuit so scorned by the Nixon Administration, people out here in Middletown, U.S.A., seem to be pretty much able to take it or leave it alone.

Not that they are unaware of the accusations and implications that several of the President's closest advisers may have been deeply involved in the bugging last June of the Democratic National Headquarters at the Watergate apartment and office complex.

Daily newspaper, radio and television coverage of developments in the case has been abundant here as elsewhere.

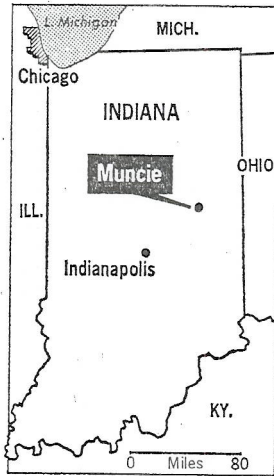
But a number of conversations over the last couple of days disclosed more casual interest than indignation. Some Democrats professed anger, but found it difficult to conceal a certain partisan glee. Some Republicans' remarks were tinged with embarrassment. And some people sounded just plain bored.

## Voice of the People?

Charles Spencer may have spoken for many when he wrote in a letter published yesterday morning in The Muncie Star:

"It seems that every newspaper and every radio broadcasting of news harps on the Watergate case. Yet no lives were lost, no one harmed, no bank robbed, or large amount of money lost. And as far as we can detect, no one in particular was harmed. It is indeed getting boring."

Muncie, of course, is not America. But this old manufacturing city of 80,000 amid



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the farm lands of eastern Indiana may represent a good chunk of it. In fact, Muncie was the subject of the two "Middletown" studies made in the nineteen-twenties and thirties by Dr. Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, considered by many to be among the outstanding sociological works on the mores of a typical community in this country.

Although the city, with its large union population, is slightly Democratic, it voted heavily last November — as did most of the nation—for the re-election of President Nixon. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota was just too liberal — or radical — for many Hoosiers.

Explaining the conservative bent of local politics from behind his cluttered desk at city hall, Mayor Paul J. Cooley, a Democrat in his second four-year term, said with a smile:

"If Jacob Javits were in Muncie, he'd be considered a Communist. Even James Buckley would be considered extremely liberal."

As for the Watergate case, the graying Mayor said, "To say that there's a great wave of moral indignation over it, I don't think that's the case — I don't think that's the case anywhere."

But he said that he was "concerned about the effect that it has on the people's confidence in government." Mr. Cooley added, "There has been so much written about it—speaking as a partisan

politician, there's a danger of overkill."

"I wouldn't attack the Nixon Administration as much on Watergate as I would on the price of groceries," he continued, expressing a sentiment with which many of his constituents would seem to agree.

If there are two places in this city whose members represent opposite ends of the power structure as well as the political spectrum, they probably are the exclusive Muncie Club on East Main Street and the Labor Center on South Walnut. But it's not difficult to find agreement in either place that rising prices and a new state tax package, which includes a doubling of the sales levy to 4 per cent, are more on people's minds than Watergate.

At the modest, one-story stone Muncie Club, whose membership is made up of about 250 of the city's leading business and professional men who enter the plain outside door with a personal key, a number of them were induced to talk about the Watergate case over lunch this week.

"I can't imagine anybody having any opinion about it," said Bill Woods, the white-haired president of the American National Bank and Trust Company, "because we can't understand it. I can't imagine anybody getting mixed up in such a ridiculous thing."

## A Republican Club

"The membership of this club is, I would say, 90 per cent Republican," John P. Scanlon, an insurance man, added with a grin, "and most of them would rather hear no more about it. As a matter of fact, I probably understated that 90 per cent."

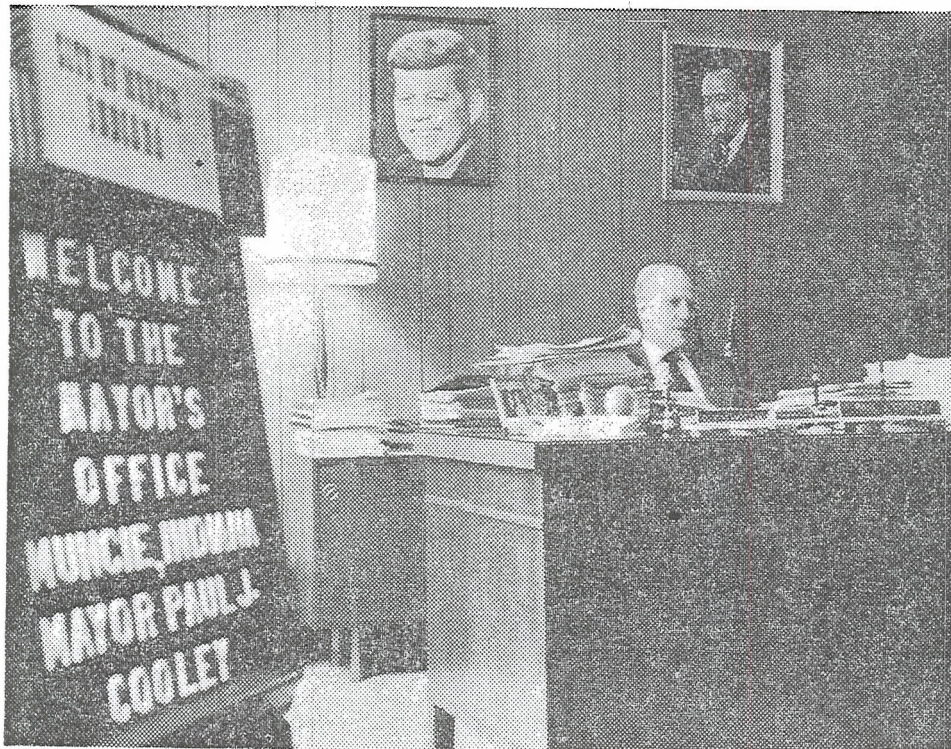
Then, glancing at his four colleagues around the table as he toyed with his fried chicken, he said he thought the most important thing was, "Why did they do it?"

"Oh, I could see how it could happen," Ralph J. Whiting, a certified public accountant, said to nods around the table. "A fellow sitting around with a few drinks and saying, 'I wonder what the Democrats are doing?' and someone says, 'Well, let's go bug them' and then it could just go on from



Ralph J. Whiting, an accountant, gave a whimsical explanation as to how the bugging might have happened.

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Mayor Paul J. Cooley of Muncie, Ind., explaining the conservative bent of local politics, said, "Even James Buckley would be considered extremely liberal."

there."

Later, in the basement clubroom of the Labor Center, whose unions represent about 20,000 workers in the area's transmission, battery, transformer, forging and other plants, members gathered over their afternoon beer were not so quick to write off the Watergate bugging as something that just sort of happened.

"I think they ought to take the whole bunch of them in the White House and just throw them out," declared Willard J. Tuttle, the stocky, dark-haired president of the retired members' chapter of United Automobile Workers Local 499.

#### A Democratic Union

"This is Democratic headquarters," explained James G. Thomas, president of Local 499, estimating that the percentage of Democrats in the unions was at least as high as that of Republicans in the Muncie Club.

"There's a lot of talk about Watergate around town," said Harry E. Douglass, a crew-cut machine operator from the Chevrolet transmission plant, "but I don't think they care too much."

"I think they see so much in the paper that they don't pay any attention to it," Art Anderson, another machine operator, interjected.

"If they can get Martha Mitchell talking maybe we'll find out what it's all about," Jim Thomas added wryly.

Then they got back to what was really on their minds.

"I agree with George Meany," Mr. Tuttle said, as the others leaned closer, staring thoughtfully at their drinks, "that unless something is done about price control, labor's going for big wage increases."

Pausing and shaking his head with resignation, he added sadly:

"And if they get the wage increases, there the prices will go again. Every raise we've got for the last 10 years didn't do no good."