



Between Roses and Skunk Cabbages

Joseph Alsop

ANYONE can see that President Nixon cannot hope to come out of the Watergate horror smelling like a rose. But after the events of Monday, a bet is here offered that the President will not be smelling like a skunk cabbage, either.

No doubt this will disappoint a few. The bet is conditional on substantiation of a recent summation of the Watergate evidence by Jack Anderson, that investigator-reporter. He wrote the other day:

"President Nixon had no advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in and bugging."

★ ★ ★

WHEN THE Watergate story was broken by the Washington Post, it must therefore have astonished the President as much as it astonished most other people.

But once again, if Jack Anderson is correct, the President had no knowledge whatever of the kind of shocking cover-up measures that were taken by some of those closest to him, allegedly including former Attorney General John Mitchell. Judging by all the known evidence, the President was persistently, flagrantly and arrogantly lied to about this matter, by a whole series of men to whom he had given total confidence.

The depth of his resentment can be seen in the way he dealt with John Mitchell after the real Watergate story began to emerge before the grand jury. This was when Mitchell was called to the White House on April 15. Mitchell was not allowed to see the President. He was given

the dire news by a man he hates, John Ehrlichman. This is not the way any President handles a man who has been his closest intimate, unless a catastrophic loss of faith has already occurred.

Such, then, are the tentative bases on which one may judge the ultimate political effects of the Watergate horror. Two aspects of the horror are bound to hurt the President permanently, although far from fatally. He cannot get rid of the responsibility for hiring and trusting the people responsible for the horror. He also waited far too long to make the clean cut that was obviously necessary.

★ ★ ★

THERE is also the possibility that one of the men so wrongly trusted by the President will now turn upon him, and will seek to implicate him from motives of revenge. Every last one of them was looking forward to the most glittering rewards in private life. Now, however, that delightful prospect has paled and vanished.

Looking over the line-up, however, there is only one man who seems to need watching. On the basis of the known facts, John Dean III strikes one as the kind of man who might get nasty, even by seeking to implicate the President.

But Dean will not do this, if he has a decent lawyer of his own. And Dean will not matter much, anyway, if Jack Anderson's version of what happened is generally sustained by other evidence.

These are the reasons, finally, that the President should finally emerge from the Watergate horror without smelling like a skunk cabbage.