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# Nixon's Speech: A Clean Cut But Late

Anyone can see the President 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 also conditional on substantiation of a recent, far too little noticed summation of the Watergate evidence by Jack Anderson, that ferocious investigator-reporter. Anderson as certainly shown no signs of a soft spot for Richard M. Nixon. He has further seemed to have complete access to the grand jury testimony in the Watergate case. With this knowledge, 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 people. It was then campaign time. It could be carrying faith in human nature too far, to suppose the candidate-president did not then want his subordinates to tidy the mess into obscurity as far as this was possible. No candidate-President of the last 40 years could have wanted less.

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; and in this waiting period, the horror was made even more horrible.

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. For some, the outlook is also hideously dark, since actual crimes have undoubtedly been committed.

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 ought to have been disbarred before he became the President's counsel. He strikes one as the kind of man who might try to get his own back, 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. This means of course that although he may be somewhat damaged, he will still be a relatively intact President, with more than enough political authority to discharge the dreadful responsibilities that the modern presidency imposes.

Barring the most passionate Nixon-haters—a minority sect at best—this is the final outcome that most people in the country have been hoping for. Almost all Americans have enough common sense to see the terrible danger of going into a period of many risks and challenges, both at home and abroad, with a president who has been politically crippled.

Hence President Nixon can in fact count on being given the benefit of the doubt by most people in this country—now that he has finally made the deep, clean cut that the Watergate horror always demanded. Thank God he has done so, and pray God it produces the result here forecast. Otherwise, we shall all suffer.