

NYTimes

Reflections on Watergate

'We Must Create a Code of Ethics'

To the Editor:

The Administration's handling of the Watergate affair does nothing to challenge the general belief that governments do a poor job of policing themselves.

With our present system, the best we can hope for is that Democrats will expose Republicans and Republicans expose Democrats whenever each is in a position to do so. While that is preferable to allowing scoundrels to act at will, we must hope that we can do better.

Two complementary approaches suggest themselves:

¶We must create and enforce an explicit code of ethics for public servants in much the same way as the bar association creates and enforces a code of ethics for the legal profession. The schools of public administration in this country would be the logical institutions around which such an effort could begin.

Care should be taken that the organization eventually given enforcement powers limits its authority to controlling exit and not entry. In other words, the aim should be to create an organization which would have the power to suspend an individual's right to employment in a public organization for breaching the code of ethics, and not to decide upon the standards for entry into public service in the first place. The latter power leads to the monopolistic practices of organizations such as the American Medical Association.

¶To complement the intraorganizational discipline exerted by an enforced code of ethics, external discipline is necessary.

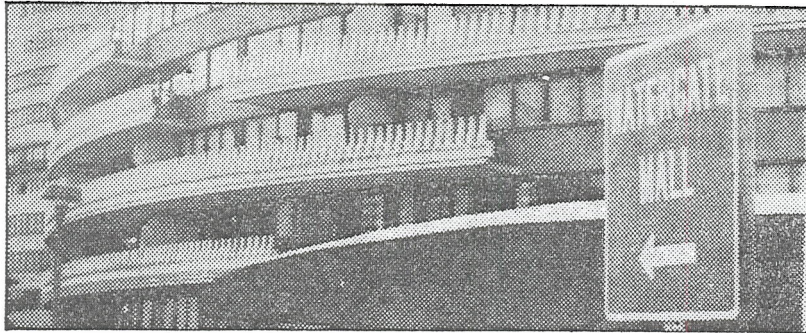
Experience has shown that as far as corruption is concerned Federal, state and local prosecutors and police are primarily interested in the party out of power. A possible solution to this problem is the creation of a new single-purpose Federal agency charged with the responsibility of exposing and prosecuting Government corruption.

The agency should be as independent as possible of the party in power. Such independence could be gained by having the agency headed by commissioners appointed for ten years with no more than one-third of the commission coming from any single party (including independents).

Under Article II of the Constitution, the appointments could be made by the President, by executive department heads or by the courts, subject to the advice and consent of the Senate.

If Congress wished to exert more control over the commission, it could be established as an arm of Congress, similar to the General Accounting Office. In that case, the commission would be able to expose, but not prosecute, corruption.

Together, these proposals could generate both internal and external pressures for honesty and fair-dealing in government. ALLAN S. MANDEL
Ann Arbor, Mich., May 1, 1973



'A Sign That the System Is Working Well'

To the Editor:

The coverage and public discussion of the Watergate affair has concentrated on the malfeasance of individuals and on the more general value system which led so many high Government officials to act illegally and immorally. The very fact of the exposure is, however, a sign that the system is working tolerably well.

The Founding Fathers designed the American polity along the lines of limited and divided governmental power precisely because they held skeptical views regarding human nature. The exposure took place in spite of strenuous efforts at suppression in the executive branch because the combined power of Congress, the judiciary and the press prevailed.

The doctrine of limited power is today less popular than that which holds that societal problems will be solved when power is concentrated in the hands of the "proletariat" or, to use the current jargon, "the people."

These are empty words since power must be wielded by specific individuals. In practice, they become the self-perpetuating "New Class" of functionaries described by Milovan Djilas. They share with their bourgeois

predecessors the age-old propensity of man to serve primarily his self-interest. They differ in that they have eliminated alternative bases of power which could operate as a check on the exercise of their own.

I have compared the pluralistic society with the totalitarianism of the left, since that is what exerts a strong fascination on many people, particularly among the young, who are tired of the problems and the general untidiness of the liberal democracies. Let me add that I consider the dictatorships of the right to be even worse. They lack the moral impulse, which, while often perverted, still plays a significant role in the socialist countries and has enabled them to overcome some of their own worst excesses. They have yet to achieve even that modest degree of liberty which would allow a man like Djilas to write his books in prison.

The lesson of Watergate is that the pluralistic society still offers the best assurance that those who abuse power, rather than those who expose them, will get to see the inside of a jail.

CLAUDE HILLINGER
Munich, West Germany, May 29, 1973

'Only Trees Are Perfect'

To the Editor:

Did you ever see anything like the hypocrisy of some people in this Watergate case? Rigged elections of some kind are common in high schools, colleges, parish committees, civic organizations, small and large corporations. There's scarcely an adult American who hasn't been touched by one, as perpetrator, accessory or victim. Why the righteous disbelief of Watergate?

Let's be as lenient toward the dark side of Richard Nixon as we are toward our own. A man who has brought such strength to his massive accomplishments in only four short years—accomplishments that the American people don't even begin to understand or appreciate—deserves some weakness in other areas.

Come off the romantic pose, America. Only God's trees and flowers are perfect.

JEANNE MCQUADE
Queens Village, N. Y., May 3, 1973

'Is Not the End-All To Be Number One?'

To the Editor:

According to the press, many Americans are not outraged by the Watergate scandal because they see neither "victims" nor personal financial gain derived from it, and it was simply one of those things that happen in "politics," where, after all, the fundamental goal is to win.

Is not winning what we have all been taught that life is about? Is not the end-all of business, sports, politics, even university life, to be Number One?

Given this basic competitive philosophy that dominates American life, surely it was only a question of time before its full and ugly consequences would manifest themselves in the political sphere. The irony—one is tempted to say poetic justice—lies in the fact that these ugly consequences should erupt within the halls of the White House when it has a resident who has so zealously embraced this philosophy throughout his public career and whose publicly endorsed heroes are those pro-football coaches who are the most visible and blatant embodiments of it.

Nevertheless, it should not be surprising that so many Americans fail to be indignant about the matter: It is all a part of the game.

It is also with a feeling of poetic justice that one remembers it was the late Adlai Stevenson—whom Mr. Nixon was reported to have held in contempt (was it because he was not a winner?)—who understood that competition and winning are poor models to guide our behavior in areas like friendship, family and public life. The aim of a political campaign in a republic, he idealistically believed, was not so much to win as to dramatize and clarify the issues. Better to lose and educate, he once said, than to win and obfuscate.

It is probably too much to hope that Mr. Nixon could ever appreciate that philosophy, but it is sad that so many Americans are not more upset that he does not.

VAN A. HARVEY
Wynnewood, Pa., May 1, 1973

'The Climate for Reform Has Never Been Better'

To the Editor:

Out of the ashes of the Watergate disaster, a new interest in the need to reform our campaign-financing laws at every level of government should arise.

President Nixon, Governor Rockefeller and others who felt they had an economic advantage always chose to frustrate previous efforts to achieve such objectives. During the President's unfortunately incomplete Watergate statement of April 30, he urged citizens "to join in working toward a new set of standards, new rules and procedures to insure that future elections will be as nearly free of such abuses as they possibly can be made."

The President should have followed that statement with a program designed to take the financing of Presidential campaigns away from private interests. What else could have served more effectively to restore damaged confidence in the American system?

To provide the public with assurances against corruption and candidates with the dignity, freedom and equality that democracy requires, campaigns should ideally be paid for at government expense. At the very least, contributions should be limited to \$1,000 per person with a concomitant enforceable limitation on expenditures by any candidate. Reform should include appropriate eligibility requirements for public financing of

the primaries. Meaningful laws capable of stringent enforcement can safeguard these principles to the eternal benefit of every person in America, and of our system itself. Once established for the Presidential election, the same principles can be extended to Congressional elections. Then it will only be a matter of time before the states follow.

While the Watergate affair and its many ramifications may forever stain the American political system, they can also be a useful opportunity if the atmosphere that now exists becomes the bipartisan impetus for reform. The climate has never been better. Candidates, contributors and other citizens would all be beneficiaries.

MATTHEW L. LIFFLANDER
New York, May 4, 1973

The writer is finance chairman of the New York State Democratic Committee and was treasurer of Senator Muskie's campaign in New York.

'Maybe Not as Bungling ...'

To the Editor:

The Republican Administration has been accused of incompetence in its attempt to deceive the public about I.T.T., Watergate, newspaper ads and so on. Maybe it's not as bungling as it seems. Many of us are still under the impression that 49 of 50 states voted to keep Richard Nixon their leader four more years. OLIVER KOOL
Cambridge, Mass., April 27, 1973



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'Scandals Epitomize Our Very System'

To the Editor:

At a time when it is fashionable and self-protective to understand current White House scandals in circumstantial terms (much as the Indochina wars have been understood), may I offer an alternative perspective?

These scandals, like our wars, are not unfortunate aberrations produced by the confluence of otherwise discrete circumstances. Rather, they in some profound sense epitomize our very system, operating at its crudest and shorn of its veils of legitimacy,

The manipulation of voters, corruption of officials and to some extent even the political espionage associated with these scandals are not rarities in our politics. Teapot Dome and the Watergate affair distract us from a still more unpalatable reality: the daily accepted political corruption and manipulation, which the influence of individual and corporate wealth entails for American politics. The selling of candidates, the managing of polls and the misrepresenting of issues and candidates' positions, these practices are more or less bipartisan in our political life.

To this reality, the Nixon entourage has indeed added another dimension. President Nixon and CREEP (and its earlier incarnations in Mr. Nixon's previous campaigns) have been willing to go beyond what is conventionally acceptable in pursuit of the power to better serve primarily the rich and secondarily the fearful and the complacent.

Watergate and the rest, then, cannot be dismissed simply as the product of official stupidity and Presidential paranoia, as James Reston would have us believe. A Government that is privatized and serves not the best interests of its people but those of I.T.T., the oil industry, Lockheed, the milk lobby, etc., is a kind of mammoth conspiracy.

Interpreting particular events in terms of any system theory always is problematic. Circumstantial explanations, relatively reassuring and seemingly unideological, have time and again proved alluring.

Nevertheless, greater insight into the causes and meanings of both the current political scandals and the continuing Indochina wars may be achieved, I submit, if they are understood not as unhappy coincidences but as flagrant products of American capitalism and imperialism.

RICHARD M. PFEFFER
Baltimore, May 4, 1973