

Tales for the Marines

NYTimes

MAY 15 1973

By Russell Baker

OBSERVER

WASHINGTON, May 14—People who believe in the system are writing to ask how they can defend it against those who say Watergate proves it a failure. The following guide to answering typical questions arising from the Watergate affair should be mastered so that the appropriate answer comes automatically to the tongue.

Question: How can you say the system isn't corrupt when the White House and the C.I.A. are conniving at burglary and the F.B.I. is destroying evidence of crime?

Answer: It is unfair to blame the whole system just because a few of its parts may fail. The Department of Commerce was clean.

Question: But isn't the system pretty rotten when the State Department cooperates with a political scheme to defame a former President with forged diplomatic documents?

Answer: You are not looking at the over-all picture. The Pentagon was also asked to turn over documents to be forged, but did not comply. The Smithsonian Institution was not asked, but there is no reason to believe it would have complied if it had been. Be fair.

Question: Was the system fair to the country when one party used sabotage methods developed for destroying Nazis in order to destroy the other party's Presidential nominating process and aid the nomination of a weak candidate?

Answer: If Mr. McGovern was such a weak candidate, how do you explain the fact he was able to carry Massachusetts?

Question: Isn't the system in pretty bad shape when the top White House lawyer ends up trying to trade testimony against his colleagues for immunity from prosecution?

Answer: You should be thankful that in the free world we can still enjoy immunity from prosecution. In the Communist world this freedom would be impossible.

Question: Isn't the system pretty close to the police state, when the President can bring the apparatus of

the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the Justice Department and the White House into play to obtain the conviction of one man?

Answer: Nonsense. Look at the Ellsberg case. The system made it possible for Ellsberg to escape conviction. The system will work just as well for any man who doesn't crack under four years of Government harassment, can spend two or three years of his life standing around courtrooms, and has \$500,000 for legal fees.

Question: Why should I have any respect for a system that promises me law and order and gave me Watergate?

Answer: They all do it.

Question: Isn't it the final sign of the system's failure that when a group of politicians is shown to have been engaged in shabby, squalid and criminal activities, large numbers of the public say, "They all do it"?

Answer: This system, remember, was the first to put a man on the moon. And anyhow, India is pretty corrupt too, in spite of its self-righteous eagerness to lecture the United States.

Question: What about the dirty money laundered in Mexico? What about the Vesco case? What about the indictment of one Attorney General and the resignation of the other? What about I.T.T. and Dita Beard? What about I.T.T. and the C.I.A.?

Answer: Questions like those must never be dignified with the answering, for they smack of McCarthyism at its worst, and that is something the system will never permit.

Question: Hasn't the system failed entirely in not providing some constitutional method for ridding us of this present Government until 1977?

Answer: Four more years! Four more years!

Question: Isn't the system rotten to the core when its spokesmen can no longer reply rationally to critical questioning, but fall back instead upon the mindless shouting of slogans?

Answer: They all do it.