



The Acceptance Of Dirty Tricks

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THE MORE we learn about Watergate the more we understand that it is not primarily a political scandal growing out of campaign practices. It is primarily a governmental scandal growing out of a corrupt system.

Some of the best men in Washington, including Henry Kissinger, General Alexander Haig and Richard Helms have been compromised. Their passive acceptance of dirty tricks had nothing to do with politics or the 1972 campaign.

Consider the case of Kissinger. He has shown not a little more courage at the National Security Council. He has conveyed his own reservations about aspects of official policy.

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BUT BACK in May 1969, the administration began bugging the home telephone of one of Kissinger's senior associates at the NSC, Morton Halperin. The existence of the Halperin tap became known in connection with disclosures the administration was obliged to make in the Pentagon Papers trial after it emerged that parties to the Watergate break-in had earlier attempted, under White House orders, a burglary in the office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

We now know that Kissinger in fact helped arrange for the Halperin bugging at a meeting in the FBI office of the late director J. Edgar Hoover.

Haig, who served for four years as Kissinger's deputy before moving to be No. 2 man in the Army, had to know about the Halperin bugging. He has not been asked about it, but he went out to the Pentagon papers trial in Los Angeles and testified for the prosecution regarding the exact

nature of Halperin's relation to the NSC staff. In order to win brownie points with Mr. Nixon, in other words, Haig went into court with dirty hands.

Finally, there is the case of Helms. As director of the CIA from 1966 through 1972, he gained a reputation as a thoroughly honest professional. He let the facts speak even when they spoke messages the administration did not like.

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BUT THE CIA was dragged into what has become known as Watergate in two ways. First, the agency, at the request of the White House, gave help to the men who attempted burglary on the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist back in 1971. Next, after the actual Watergate break-in of June 1972, the CIA participated with the FBI in the first stages of an investigation now known to have been manipulated by the White House.

Helms was not ignorant of those abuses of the agency by the White House. Early this year, he was asked a kind of catch-all question about Watergate and the CIA during his Senate hearings for confirmation to be Ambassador to Iran. He volunteered an answer which gave the CIA a clean bill of health in Watergate.

The point of all this is not that Kissinger, Haig and Helms are bad men. They are not. They are the best the country has to offer.

But the fact that officials of their caliber can be compromised by Watergate is a gauge of how much reform is necessary. It is not a matter of changing campaign laws or firing half a dozen men or even impeaching the President. What has to be changed is the whole spirit of government.