

Letters to the Editor

Watergate, the Press and the Prosecutor



NYTimes MAY 17 1973

To the Editor:

Senator Proxmire's equating of press and television reporting of Watergate and related subversive activities with McCarthyism reveals fundamental confusion on his part regarding what is involved and what is at stake.

The subversion of our election process, of freedom of the press and of due process of law represented by Watergate has been accomplished through systematic abuse of executive power analogous in many respects to McCarthy's abuse of senatorial power. Subversion of democratic institutions through abuse of government power is the essence of McCarthyism.

Reporting the acts, events and consequences of the abuse of power is not McCarthyism. The press, in reporting accusations, whether supported by hard facts or not, is not practicing McCarthyism.

McCarthyism was not the product of the press. It was the product of cowardice in government and public hysteria. It was the duty of the press to report every aspect of that nightmare, and it must do the same with this sordid affair.

I cannot believe that Messrs. Agnew and Proxmire are not as aware as any well-informed person that the press is neither inhibited by due process, which restrains the exercise of government power, nor by the rules of evidence, which govern the admission of testimony in legal proceedings. If hearsay could not be reported, what would government press releases consist of and what would constitute news?

F. J. RARIG

Doylestown, Pa., May 11, 1973

The writer served as a special assistant to the Attorney General of the United States from 1940 to 1946.

To the Editor:

We are already tired of Watergate — tired of the stupidities involved. Why not, with the same zeal, go after the many lapses from justice that have happened in the recent past?

For example, the J. F. Kennedy debacle with the Presidential voting in West Virginia and others. Also, the recent tragedy of Edward Kennedy at Chappaquiddick, which has been swept under the carpet by various agencies.

At stake in Watergate is the integrity of the American way of politics, which has enlarged its borders to the present state of things. Why point the accusing finger at those now in-

involved when this sort of thing has been going on for an increasingly long time? Why not make a clean statement of the American way by being honest enough to reveal the whole picture as well as the present debacle? The responsibility for this rests with the entire nation — not just an isolated few.

It is time for the American people to be honest and pursue this subject in its true light. Many around the world will think this is not too much to ask.

ADRIAN LAMB

New York, May 9, 1973

To the Editor:

Elliot Richardson's proposal that he have ultimate responsibility for the Watergate investigation inherently conflicts with the proclaimed needs for effective and independent investigation of the involvement of the Administration in this scandal. Indeed, the very making of the proposal shows that Mr. Richardson and the Administration of which he is a part still are unwilling to deal forthrightly with this matter.

Query: Would potential witnesses against key personnel in the Administration feel confident in supplying information to the Watergate prosecutor if that information might be reported back to the very Administration personnel being investigated?

Query: Would the investigator or the Attorney General decide whether to grant immunity to potential witnesses?

Query: Would the investigator or the Attorney General decide the scope of the executive privilege claimed by the Administration?

Query: Assuming the President was not involved in Watergate and its cover-up, will the American people accept a bill of health from a member of the Administration?

It is hard to understand why the Congress does not set the matter straight by appointing and funding a fully independent prosecutor. There is ample precedent in the Teapot Dome investigation for Congress itself to establish such an independent prosecutorial office (see 43 U. S. Statutes at Large, page 5, S. J. Res. 54, Feb. 8, 1924). It is about time Congress took the reins and got to the heart of the Watergate story.

EUGENE H. ZAGAT JR.

New York, May 10, 1973

The Connally Myth

To the Editor:

Your May 4 editorial stated that former Secretary of the Treasury John Connally's "truculent chauvinism, his shock tactics and most of his policies . . . left behind a damaging residue of disillusionment and distress in the fairness and constancy of the United States." This is the latest, most artistically worded repetition of a myth. Like its less illustrious predecessors which have generally filled your pages whenever John Connally's name has been mentioned, it is a sorry perversion of the truth.

As I see it, prior to Aug. 15, 1971, President Nixon, many U.S. Government bureaucrats involved in international relations and most of the Eastern press shared the view that the United States must be prepared to yield to foreign countries on economic matters in the higher interests of our international political and military relations. John Connally was the man who convinced President Nixon that this view was dangerously out of date and was destroying our world leadership position.

The change in U.S. Government policy which has since evolved reflects great credit on both John Connally and President Nixon. This truly historic turnabout in U.S. Government policy would not have been possible without John Connally's imagination and dynamism and President Nixon's receptivity to fresh approaches and new ideas.

In view of the foregoing, I conclude that your continued emotional reaction to Mr. Connally's praiseworthy contribution is founded on nothing more substantial than your contumacious refusal to acknowledge that he was right and you were wrong.

VICTOR A. MACK

Silver Spring, Md., May 4, 1973

Selective Morality

To the Editor:

The Rev. Billy Graham weighs the implications of the sordid Watergate affair for our nation (Op-Ed May 6). One can hardly fault him when he states that "we need a national and pervasive awakening that includes repentance for our individual and corporate sins."

Unfortunately, Mr. Graham limits himself to the realm of generalities. He appears to be totally oblivious of our ongoing major transgression: the savage, senseless bombing of Cambodia.

It is this kind of pragmatic, selective morality that breeds contempt for all moral standards, that has undermined the credibility of our religious establishments and that is ultimately responsible for reducing us to a moral status that, in Mr. Graham's own words, "would make Sodom blush."

ALFRED GOLDSMITH

Pearl River, N. Y., May 7, 1973