

## More of the Truth . . .

President Nixon's lengthy statement on the Watergate scandals reveals more of the truth than he or any of his senior associates had previously been willing to put on the record. The involvement of the President and of his White House aides in the tangled events that led to these assorted crimes and conspiracies and the subsequent attempt to cover them up is much more extensive than had previously been acknowledged.

The President attempts to justify this involvement by asserting the claims of national security and internal security, but what comes through is the picture of a Government frighteningly out of control and directed by men seemingly incapable of making the most elementary distinctions between foreign affairs and domestic affairs, between the interests of the nation and the interests of a particular President or political party, between what is legal and illegal and between what might be permissible in a grave emergency and what is routine procedure.

Even on the President's own intellectual premises, his statement raises serious doubts about his own conduct. The internal security plan which he first approved and then rescinded under pressure from F.B.I. Director J. Edgar Hoover in 1970 included the President's authorization for "surreptitious entry—breaking and entry, in effect—on specified categories of targets."

Is it ever wise for the Government to become law-breaker? Normal police methods of surveillance and infiltration would surely have been sufficient to let the Government keep tabs on violence-prone radicals without engaging in these lawless and irregular measures. In the light of Mr. Nixon's admission that he approved such measures in one context in 1970, it is hard to accept unreservedly his disclaimer that, in the case of the burglarizing of the office of Mr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist and similar incidents, "I would have disapproved had they been brought to my attention."

\* \* \*

President Nixon's discussion of the Central Intelligence Agency's relationship to the Watergate break-in is perplexing. "I was advised that there was a possibility of C.I.A. involvement in some way. It did seem to me possible that . . . the investigation could lead to the uncovering of covert C.I.A. operations totally unrelated to the Watergate break-in."

Mr. Nixon does not state who advised him of this notion, but surely the President had only to call the head of the C.I.A. and get a clear-cut answer as to whether its agents or covert operations were involved. There is no possible excuse for a President to be in doubt about such a question. In fact, Richard Helms, then director of C.I.A., and his deputy were at that time specifically informing Mr. Nixon's top aides that their agency was in no way involved.

The conversation last July 6 between the President and L. Patrick Gray, then acting director of the F.B.I., is profoundly disturbing. It makes nonsense of the President's subsequent assertions—repeated even in this latest statement—that no one warned him that higher-ranking persons than the arrested burglars were probably involved. In view of the instructions to cooperate in limiting the investigation, which the President transmitted directly to Mr. Gray and—through his aides, H. R. Haldeman and John D. Ehrlichman—to the C.I.A., Mr. Gray had good reason to doubt whether the President really wanted a proper, thorough investigation of Watergate. The monstrous attempt to mask the Watergate crime as a covert C.I.A. operation can only be said to have flowed naturally from the President's expressed wishes, whether or not he specifically ordered the attempt.

Although the President's latest statement discloses more of the truth, only the statements of other principals can show whether the whole truth has yet been revealed. Mr. Nixon has reiterated several specific denials about the extent of his knowledge of and therefore his culpability for various misdeeds. Those denials have to stand the test of time. Meanwhile, it is abundantly clear that an inflated and erroneous conception of "national security" led to criminal behavior which has brought the office of the President into grave disrepute.

## . . . Footnote

Rational discourse between President Nixon and his critics about the phenomenon called "Watergate" has been foundering on an unfortunate verbal imprecision.

"I had no prior knowledge of the Watergate operation," the President reiterated in the official summary of his Tuesday statement. Obviously here, and probably in all the preceding White House disclaimers, the term "Watergate" refers to the actual break-in at the Democratic National Committee on June 17, 1972. Illegal and outrageous though that episode was, partisans of the President would probably be right in accusing the news media of sensationalism if that was all there was to it.

There was, of course, much more to it: the deliberate espionage *apparat* to penetrate and sabotage the activities and decisions of political opponents, the employment of extralegal means available through Presidential power for partisan political ends, the subversion of the processes of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A., etc., etc., etc.—all the misdeeds of the last couple of years now flooding into the public awareness. This is what the national despair over "Watergate" is all about, not the deed so much as the mentality and value system which made it possible.