

Poster

The Domestic Nixon Doctrine

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

By now Richard Nixon must want to do a lot more to Daniel Ellsberg than break into his shrink's office. Just when it looked like Elliot Richardson was going to slip into the Attorney General's job without any serious questions being raised about this overly smooth politician, Ellsberg released information indicating Richardson too has played a shadowy and far too reticent role in the nebulae of scandals called Watergate.

As a consequence he was called back to the Senate Judiciary Committee that was weighing his qualifications before clearing his nomination as Attorney General. That was a lovely scene. During the intermissions, while the senators marched off to vote, Ellsberg held forth to the reporters in the back of the room, guiding them in his tense, low-voiced way through the ant tunnels of this complex case. Then the astonishingly well-tailored Richardson would reappear to be questioned by the committee members, notably by Byrd of West Virginia, who is no man to play verbal games with.

On this occasion they didn't get into Richardson's foil, the ineffectual Archibald Cox who has been cast in the role of the clean, special prosecutor destined to put all the bad guys in jail. The senators know that by the best calculations Mr. Cox, our crusading national district attorney, hasn't faced a jury in 31 years, but they did drag out of Richardson that he knew that Nixon knew of the Ellsberg burglary at least by late March.

At almost the same moment down at the White House, Ronald Ziegler, as the reporters now pun on his name, was reading a Nixon statement saying that it was not until April 25th that the President knew E. Howard Hunt, one of the convicted crooks who used to be on his payroll, had broken into the office of Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

But this suggestion of collusion between the Attorney General-designate and his boss was overlooked as the reporters were knocked over by the larger admission that Nixon had authorized, as he said in his own words, "surreptitious entry—breaking and entering, in effect—on specified categories of targets in specified situations related to national security."

These burglaries were to be committed without a court order, under the color of no known American law, in accordance with some still secret plan which was blocked and not put into effect because of the protests of J. Edgar Hoover. Subsequent events indicate Nixon is lying on that one too. Although he denies knowledge of it, the breaking into Ellsberg's shrink's office follows the plan he admits he concocted. But more than that, we have the Collinsville, Ill., case in which a mob of federal narcotics agents smashed their way into the homes of two innocent families, destroyed their belongings and terrorized them and their children.

If anything, it now appears that Richard Nixon's law-and-order-through-crime plan was executed and was not restricted to national security cases, whatever that dan-

gerously vague term means. The truth is a band of presidential goons have endangered national and personal security by suspending the Bill of Rights.

Richard Nixon begs us to make a distinction between Watergate and the White House's Special Investigations Unit, the Masked Plumbers. The Plumbers, he says, were working on national security while the Watergate crooks were naughty boys doing things he didn't approve of. The only problem is that the Plumbers and the Watergate crooks are virtually the same people.

He can't even make the distinction he wants us to bear in mind while forgiving him. "Elements of the early post-Watergate reports led me to suspect, incorrectly, that the CIA had been in some way involved," he tells us, and then adds, "I sought to prevent the exposure of these covert national security activities, while encouraging those conducting the investigation to pursue their inquiry into the Watergate itself."

Now his own man, Ehrlichman, ordered the deputy director of the CIA to lie to the FBI to say that the agency had a national-security interest in one aspect of the case. McCord has testified that he was offered a CIA cover in order to beat the rap on the Watergate burglary. The modus operandi of these criminals is simple: If you get caught we'll call it national security and get you off.

After this breathtaking statement was read to the reporters in the White House press room, the scene that followed was a mixture of shock, pandemonium, anger, incredulity — and haste because UPI had broken the time embargo on the statement's release so people had to write their stories instead of asking questions. With all the yelling and carrying on you could still hear Dick Strout of the Christian Science Monitor, one of the most respected journalists in the city, a man who covered Teapot Dome, you could hear him shouting, "Is this going to be inoperative too?"

Whatever the answer to that question, with each new set of falsehoods, evasions and calculated misunderstandings, Richard Nixon is being forced to lie his way into the truth.