

## Senator Baker Gets Mad

# A Matter of Ethics

By William Greider

Washington Post Service

### Washington

Bart Porter, another one of those super-trim young men from the Nixon campaign, walked into the Senate Watergate hearings yesterday clothed in a self-righteous plea of innocence — but he went home morally naked.

"I have been guilty," he insisted smugly at the beginning, "of a deep sense of loyalty to the President of the United States. The facts will speak for themselves."

### Analysis and Opinion

The facts, as Porter recited them clickety-clack, included his own complicity with "dirty tricks" and secret money in the 1972 campaign. Matter-of-factly, he recounted for the committee his casual agreement to lie to federal investigators and the grand jury at the first Watergate trail. Prejudice, it seems, went down as smoothly as the second martini.

But the senator from Tennessee, an old Nixon Republican himself, stripped Porter of his self-confidence with a question that wasn't pre-programmed. Why? What about your conscience? What about old-fashioned right and wrong?

"I need to know more of why," Senator Howard Baker pleaded.

### REACTION

At first, Porter didn't understand the question.

So Senator Baker repeated it more forcefully. The only explanation the witness could provide merely outraged his fellow Republican more.

Porter pleaded loyalty to President Nixon and loyalty to the Nixon team. He didn't speak out against the "dirty" practices, he said, "in all honesty, probably because of the fear of group pressure that would ensue, of not being a team player."

Baker, his face flushed with temper, answered sharply:

"I really expect that the greatest disservice that a man could do to a President of the United States would be to abdicate his conscience."

The brief exchange yesterday perfectly dramatized



UPI Telephoto

Clenching his fists in anger, Senator Baker sharply questioned Herbert Porter's motive for lying

the persistent question of ethics which lies behind the tangle of facts now woven into the Watergate affair.

"The submergence of conscience," Baker called it.

The Senator probed unsuccessfully to discover how this code of rigid loyalty could take hold so poisonously within the Nixon organization.

Their operative cliché was "team player."

As they have been hailed before various public forums in recent months, the "team players" have even looked alike. Blandly handsome, well-turned and conservative modish clothes, super healthy. They even talk alike — a business-like jargon that is standard English only among high-priced memo writers and computers. A 35-year-old former marketing executive, Porter wore a gray plaid suit and razor-cut hair and wire-rim glasses.

### TONE

The creepy thing was his buoyant tone at the beginning, as if his "loyalty to the President plea" would cover all sins. Further, he mentioned the "devastating effect on my personal life," a lucrative job he lost because of the scandal.

The fellow seemed genuinely confused when Senator Baker didn't buy it.

"Did you ever have any

qualms about what you were doing, about the propriety of hiring these people for the dirty tricks or whatever it was? I am probing into your state of mind, Mr. Porter."

### EFFECT

"I understand," said the witness. "I think the thought crossed my mind, senator, in all honesty, that I really could not see what effect it had on re-electing a President of the United States."

"On the other hand, in all fairness, I was not the one to stand up in a meeting and say that this should be stopped . . . I kind of drifted along."

But Baker pressed him on the organizational climate:

"At any time, did you ever think of saying, 'I do not think this is quite right, this is not quite the way it ought to be?' Did you ever think of that?"

"I think most people would probably stop and think about that," Porter said meekly.

Baker: "Did you?"

Porter: "Yes, I did."

Baker: "What did you do about it?"

Porter: "I did not do anything."

Baker: "Why didn't you?"

Porter pleaded the internal pressure to be a team player.

### ABDICATE

"What caused you," Baker asked, "to abdicate your own conscience and disapproval — if you did disapprove — of the 'dirty tricks' operations?"

"Well, Senator Baker, my loyalty to this man, Richard

Nixon, goes back longer than any person that you will see sitting at this table throughout any of these hearings," Porter replied. "I first met the President—"

The senator interrupted in a flash of anger.

"I really very much doubt that, Mr. Porter," Baker snapped. "I have known Richard Nixon probably longer than you have been alive and I really expect that the greatest disservice that a man could do to a President of the United States would be to abdicate his conscience."

Porter said he has worked in campaigns for Richard Nixon since he was 8 years old, growing up in California where Mr. Nixon first ran for Congress.

### AGREE

But the confident tone turned contrite. The witness agreed with the senator that "loyalty" was no defense.

He agreed with Senator Baker's fervent wish that politics be "exposed to the fresh breeze of conscience."

How can we do that, Baker asked. "I think you're doing a damn fine job right now, sir," Porter replied.