

# Loyalty Over Conscience

## Nixon Campaign Aide Tries to Explain the 'Why'

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

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

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 and the first Watergate trail. Perjury, 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," Sen. Howard Baker pleaded.

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.

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### SCENE, From A1

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 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.

The 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 which is standard English only among high-priced memo writers and computers.

Porter, a 35-year-old former marketing executive, had that same fresh look of a man who exercises on a regular regimen. He wore a gray plaid suit and razor-cut hair and wire-rim glasses...

The creepy thing was his bouyant 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. The investigating committee's vice chairman pleaded for a clearer explanation "as to why a young man with your background, with your education, with your obvious intelligence, found yourself in charge of or deeply involved in a dirty tricks operation of the campaign."

In response, Porter clicked on his detailed account of all the things he didn't know about the "dirty tricks" department. Baker saw that he missed the point.

"I will put it again," said the senator, his tone drawing short. "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."

"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.

"And the fear of not being a team player was strong enough to suppress your judgment on what action you should take...?" Baker asked.

"What caused you," he 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 explained that he has been connected with campaigns for Richard Nixon since he was 8 years old, growing up in California where Nixon first ran for Congress.

"I felt a deep sense of loyalty to him," Porter said. "I was appealed to on that basis."

But the confident tone turned contrite. The witness agreed with the senator that "loyalty" was no defense. He agreed with the senator that perhaps his personal difficulties would serve as an example to others, a kind of "atonement." And he agreed with Senator Baker's fervent wish that politics is "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.