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A White House Response

WASHINGTON—Ten weeks into the Watergate siege, and the President's traditional adversaries are happily drawing up his surrender terms.

The first peace feeler surfaced a week ago when Joseph Kraft, surveying the situation, judged that, yes, the President "clearly could govern," but only upon the condition that "he would have to take many more Democrats and liberal Republicans into his Administration."

Last weekend, a political reporter floated a possible peace settlement acceptable to The Washington Post Company. A "bold and daring" scenario lay before the President, suggested the writer, "to save the Presidency and avoid the humiliation of an impeachment proceeding." The scenario: public acceptance by the President for Watergate, and the creation of a "more open and vibrant coalition Government," including establishment Democrats, Hubert Humphrey and Edmund Muskie.

Monday, in this space, Clark Clifford interpreted the national interest as now dictating the forced resignation of Vice President Agnew, his replacement by Mr. Nixon with one of three chosen by the Democratically controlled Congress, and Mr. Nixon's subsequent resignation so that a "Government of national unity" might be formed. Mr. Nixon, however, could keep his sword. "It would be a magnanimous action and assure him a place in history."

By midweek, the Kraft-Post coalition-government formula had received qualified endorsements from two network commentators and a former Maryland University poetry professor, Eugene McCarthy. The former Minnesota Senator suggested that the Democratic party be handed over the portfolios at Justice, Treasury and Defense, and the President stripped of the power of appointment to the F.B.I. and C.I.A.

Friday, James Reston bemoaned the President's hesitancy in creating this

"new bipartisan national government."

The prematurity and audacity of these schemes and demands aside, one wonders if the gentlemen involved have considered their elitist and anti-democratic character.

What they are urging is that the President betray the mandate of 1972, that he unilaterally repeal, on their behalf, the democratic verdict of the ballot box, that Mr. Nixon sell out the millions of Democrats who supported him to appease those Democrats who opposed him, that he share executive power with a political minority rejected overwhelmingly by the nation in 1968, and repudiated by its own party in the primaries and convention of 1972.

Meaning no disrespect to Senators Muskie and Humphrey, both were routed in the Democratic primaries—not only by George McGovern, but also by George Wallace, who, despite a nonexistent organization, had amassed more popular votes and support by the day of the California primary than any other Democrat in the field.

Whence then this claim of establishment liberals to share in the executive power?

"Watergate!" comes the response. But Watergate was not responsible for the debacle suffered in November by the candidate of The Post and Times, of Kraft and Clifford, of Muskie and McCarthy. Indeed, Watergate was the best, the most effective issue the Democratic ticket had. The dirty tricks, the wiretapping and bugging, did not cost Mr. McGovern votes; they cost the ticket of Nixon-Agnew votes by the hundreds of thousands. Without Watergate, the President's margin might not have been 60-40; it would have been closer to 65-35.

Assuredly, actions were taken and decisions made in this Watergate affair, both inexcusable and indefensible. But nothing has been revealed, nothing has taken place to give a shred of legitimacy to the Clifford-

Kraft claims that the liberal Democratic establishment should assume or share national power. Unlike the election of 1960, where a convincing case can be made, the election of 1972 was not stolen.

In 1972 the American people voted in favor of the President's war policy in Indochina; they voted for a strong national defense and a forward foreign policy. They voted against artificial and forced integration, against any sweeping redistribution of income, against new taxes for new Federal spending, against the programs, policies and personalities associated with the new priorities gang.

Thus, it is that the "deal" offered by Mr. Kraft, and the "solution" offered on this page by Mr. Clifford, are not only, in Kevin Phillips' phrase, "ideologically obscene," but wholly antidemocratic in nature. What these gentlemen are blithely proposing is the brokered disfranchisement of forty million Americans, the imposition upon the majority of men and policies they have repeatedly rejected. The future of democracy does not lie in surrendering power and authority to men who have tried repeatedly and failed to win it at the ballot box. There are Democrats in November's new majority who belong in Mr. Nixon's Government, but they are not of the Muskie, McCarthy, McGovern breed.

Knowing the President, his likely response to this arrogant demand that he surrender a slice of his Government to his ancient adversaries will be a vernacular translation of the abbreviated reply of General McAuliffe to his German counterpart at Bastogne. As for Mr. Clifford and Mr. Kraft, they will be entitled to share in the nation's governance just as soon as they come up with a candidate who can win more than 9 per cent of the vote in the Florida and Wisconsin primaries.

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