

Richard Nixon and Charles II: The Pitfalls of a Parallel

To the Editor:

It appears that the White House (in the person of Presidential speechwriter Aram Bakshian Jr.) has now decided to distort seventeenth-century history to support a false analogy between Charles II and the Popish Plot on the one hand and Richard Nixon and Watergate on the other [Op-Ed June 12].

Although many of the accusations made during the Popish terror were wrong in specifics, the truth was far worse—Charles had secretly negotiated a treaty with Louis XIV by which he would receive a large subsidy from the French King in return for restoring Catholicism in England.

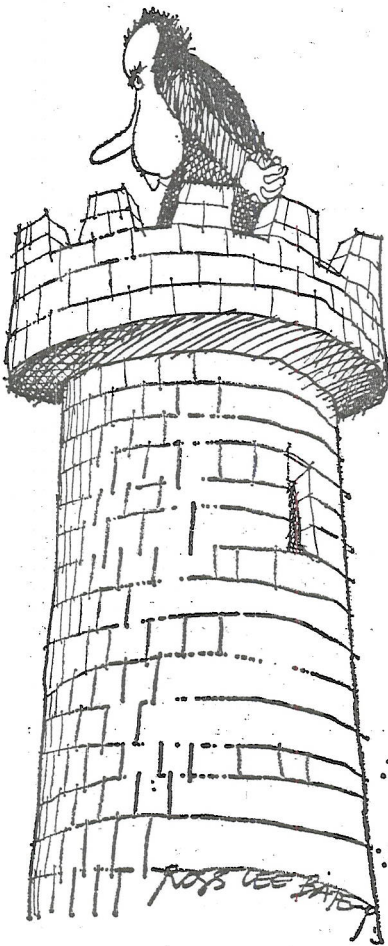
Charles accepted this foreign money in order to circumvent and weaken Parliament, which had used its power of the purse to set limits to Charles' pretensions to absolutism. The continued insistence of Charles' successor, James II, on the divine right of kings and a re-Catholicizing policy led to that famous constitutional turning point in British history, the (bloodless) Glorious Revolution of 1688, during which James fled to France and Parliament called on William of Orange to rule. The meaning of 1688 was the establishment of Parliament's supremacy over the King. Perhaps that is the seventeenth-century analogy Mr. Bakshian should ponder.

ANNE LESTER SCHAGER
New York, June 12, 1973

To the Editor:

President Nixon's speechwriter, Aram Bakshian Jr., might have chosen a more felicitous parallel to his master's Watergate difficulties than that of Charles II and the Popish Plot.

In what seems a rather odd twist for any freedom-loving democrat, Bakshian describes Charles II as the wronged good guy (Nixon) and Lord Shaftesbury as an "ulcerous and unscrupulous" scoundrel, exploiting the



panic of the day (Ervin et al., I suppose).

The fact is, of course, that Shaftesbury was the leading spokesman for the new forces of democracy in revolutionary England, the patron of John Locke and one of the early architects of what was to become the American political tradition. Charles, on the other hand, was about the last truly absolute ruler of England and the bitter enemy of Parliament. He ordered the infamous book-burning at Oxford

in 1683 as well as the exile of Shaftesbury and Locke. In describing Shaftesbury as "disgraced," Bakshian is, one must assume, expressing the royal point of view. Both Shaftesbury and Locke were heroes when the Glorious Revolution came along in 1688, and Locke, of course, was probably the most important single intellectual force behind the American Revolution.

Did the President read and endorse Bakshian's description of the "glorious days of Good King Charles"? One must suppose not, his mind being on other matters, but, as Bakshian says, "one wonders."

GEORGE C. LODGE
Beverly, Mass., June 13, 1973

The writer was Assistant Secretary of Labor for International Affairs in the Eisenhower Administration.

To the Editor:

Regarding Aram Bakshian Jr.'s nonsensical effort to compare the Popish Plot with Watergate:

The real analogy lies between the plot and the red-baiting years of the cold war, when the likes of Richard Nixon used latter-day counterparts of Titus Oates and Israel Tonge to capitalize on fears of a foreign-dominated conspiracy (Russian Communist instead of French Catholic) to overthrow the Government. Perhaps Mr. Bakshian should look for his parallel, not to 1678, but to 1688.

MARTIN B. MARGULIES
New York, June 12, 1973

To the Editor:

I am glad that a Presidential speechwriter has time these troubled days to read Restoration memoirs, but his analogy between the Titus Oates Plot and Watergate is puzzling.

Who, Mr. Bakshian, is the new Titus Oates? The press, McCord, members of the Senate Committee on Campaign Activities? Who is the new Lord Shaftesbury, that unscrupulous politician so eager to spread lies and rumors about conspiracies? Senator Ervin? Senator Weicker?

But surely the most startling of all is the attempt to drape the flowing black wig of Charles II on the head of Richard Nixon. Read on, Mr. Bakshian, and learn what one of his intimates pinned to the door of the King's bedchamber:

*Here lies our sovereign lord
the king,
Whose word no man relies on;
He never says a foolish thing,
Nor ever does a wise one.*

Yes, indeed, "history is full of echoes, parallels and forebodings. . ."

MILTON DANK
Wyncote, Pa., June 12, 1973