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'A Man Like John Dean'

Unless John W. Dean III has unexpected documents to offer, his long awaited testimony may damage the President sadly, but it is most unlikely to damage him fatally. This is because too many in Congress have already decided that the unsupported testimony of a man like Dean can have no practical consequences.

It is odd how little attention has been paid to this aspect of the matter. The impeachment of the President is the only practical, operational consequence that Dean's testimony—and indeed the whole Senate Watergate investigation—can possibly produce. Yet anyone who polls key Democratic senators and representatives, let alone Republicans, will find the same answer coming back again and again.

"I wouldn't even consider impeaching a President of the United States on the evidence of a man like Dean." That is the answer.

"A man like Dean" is the crucial phrase. In this same connection, it is again odd that those who have taken notice of the kind of man Dean is have been loudly denounced as "apologists" for the White House. When it is a question of charging an American President with criminal acts, the public surely has a right to know the character of the witnesses being called against the President.

Here take the curious matter of Dean's money transactions, which still need more coherent analysis. Surprisingly, no one else involved in the Watergate horror has yet been shown to have developed sticky fingers, despite the vast sums in cold cash that were sordidly sluicing around. But the same cannot be confidently said about John Dean, if one can believe the testimony already taken, the various sworn depositions, plus published and unchallenged leaks.

According to the testimony and depositions, Dean himself demanded full replenishment of one of the huge Watergate-linked slush funds from the Republican bagman, Maurice Stans. Stans testified that Dean explained "he would very much like to have that fund restored to \$350,000 (so) that if he ever had to account for it, it would be intact . . . he indicated that it was quite important that he have \$22,000 to restore the fund."

Depositions show that Dean was then able to send his assistant, Fred Fielding, to Stans' office to "pick up a package"—which actually contained \$22,000 in 50-dollar bills. Unchallenged leaks—in this case explained to Dean's attorney—indicate that the slush fund's real deficiency was only \$8,000 leaving John Dean with an extra \$14,000 which he placed in his own safe.

He further "borrowed" \$4,850 to pay for his honeymoon, but his story goes that he also placed his IOU in the safe. So matters were left until months later, when Dean already knew the Watergate cover-up had failed. At this point, his attorneys understandably advised him to take a new step. He did not return the \$14,000 to its original source; but he placed the money in "a special trust fund."

You can easily imagine the denunciation of "apologists" that we should

soon hear, if anyone sought to explain away comparable facts published about certain other Watergate figures. But the climate nowadays is just a mite peculiar. This was shown by Time magazine's recent, grandiose pronouncement on John Dean, that he has "prized loyalty all his life."

A few paragraphs later, in the very same report, Time added that John Dean's career "as a practicing attorney ended sourly six months" after he was first hired by a law firm. Dean was "assigned to prepare a client's application for a new television station." But Dean, alas, was later "discovered to be working on a rival application—for himself and some friends." If the law firm had rewarded this proof of compulsive loyalty with disbarment proceedings, Dean would not be playing his present conspicuous role.

All of this has current political significance precisely because such facts long since led to the judgment of Dean's character by so many senators and representatives. This does not

mean, and is emphatically not intended to mean, that Dean's testimony will be or can be disregarded. It means, rather, what Sen. Herman Talmadge has already said, that "we don't know where the truth lies until the last major witness has been heard—and maybe not even then."

Judging by the latest shrill cries from Martha Mitchell, for instance, there is a real possibility that Dean will somehow be joined as an accuser of the President by the President's former closest adviser, ex-Attorney General John Mitchell. Furthermore, if the President is convincingly accused of criminal acts, Richard M. Nixon has a duty to resign; and if he does not resign, he ought to be impeached.

But the episode of the abbreviated law practice, by itself, is enough to show what kind of man John Dean has always been. So much is highly relevant as Dean testifies, as it is also tragically relevant that the President once employed this kind of man.

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