

Joseph Kraft

Toward Impeachment

Almost all of us have some Watergate crow to eat. In my own case there is a particularly large act of recantation to perform since I was not only highly sympathetic to Mr. Nixon in 1968 but also persistently scoffed thereafter at charges the administration was endangering constitutional liberties.

But the Senate hearings have shown that this country was indeed being pushed in the direction of a police state. The pushers were not mere apparatchiks, such as John Dean, but the President and his closest associates. The evidence comes not from hearsay but from solemn documents supported by an abundance of interlocking testimony.

Begin with the lists of White House "enemies" which the committee unearthed last week thanks to the courageous determination of the young Republican senator from Connecticut, Lowell Weicker. Those lists were part of an action program to mobilize the full power of darkness available to the federal government against the political opposition. The purpose, as one of the covering memos acknowledged, was to "use the available federal machinery to screw our political enemies."

The memos indicated that screwing our enemies meant such things as prosecution by the Justice Department and trumping up scandal. The President has been charged by Mr. Dean with wanting to use the Internal Revenue Service for harassment, and we know that several individuals on the list suddenly found for the first time that their bank accounts were being subject to special scrutiny.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation was brought into the most crude political operations, including a wholly illegitimate investigation of aspects of the Chappaquiddick incident involving

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Sen. Edward Kennedy. There was wire tapping, bugging and personal surveillance on a very large scale.

When J. Edgar Hoover refused to cooperate, the White House, through the President's top domestic aide, John Ehrlichman, opened negotiations with one of Hoover's subordinates, William Sullivan. When Mr. Hoover died, the President nominated a total White House patsy, L. Patrick Gray, to replace him.

The Central Intelligence Agency was also used, in ways specifically barred by statute, for domestic political purposes. This abuse reached its high point in the effort to have the CIA provide a cover for the Watergate burglars. That such attempt was made is now known through the sworn testimony of the former director, Richard Helms; the present deputy director, Lt. Gen. Vernon Walters, as well as the former FBI director, Mr. Gray.

According to testimony supported by contemporary memos, the chief proponent of that effort was the President's closest political associate and White House chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman. His other close associate, Mr. Ehrlichman, played a role in the affair. They did so, as the President's official statement of May 22 indicates, at the express direction of Mr. Nixon himself.

When the FBI and CIA were insufficient, the Nixon White House did not scruple to act through their own goon squads. Break-ins against private citizens were organized by White House personnel apparently operating under

the direction of Ehrlichman. The Watergate break-in, in other words, was only one of a series.

A similar pattern of abuse was applied to the courts and the Congress. Mr. Nixon, according to the White House log of his meetings and phone conversations, learned about the burglary of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist in mid-March at the latest. But the fact of the burglary was not reported by federal authorities to the Ellsberg trial judge at Los Angeles until April 25. In the meantime, the President and Ehrlichman dangled the bait of an appointment to be director of the FBI in front of the judge.

As to the Congress, Sen. Weicker has shown that there was an effort to blackmail him for abuse of campaign funds. A similar effort to apply illegitimate pressure on Rep. Wright Patman (D-Tex.) has emerged, and it will be surprising if the practice was not standard.

I do not want to overdraw the picture. Many forces in American society and government were working to resist all these illegal acts. But there was a systematic effort to set up what amounts to a police state. As chairman Sam Ervin of the Senate committee has been steadily asserting, that effort is in conflict with the role of the President as defined by the Constitution.

The questions raised by that defiance of the Constitution cannot be answered by mere presidential press conferences. They can probably not even be answered, as I recently suggested, in a separate set of committee hearings. It may well be that these emerging questions can only be answered—and it now seems to me that this is where Chairman Ervin in his canniness is taking the country—in an impeachment proceeding.