

Nixon Should Be The Next Witness



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THE NEXT WITNESS at the Watergate hearings should be the President of the United States. And he had better come soon if he wants to save what is left of his presidency.

He would hate the caucus room. It is not his kind of scene. He likes quiet, empty rooms, where the temperature is carefully controlled and no unpleasant truths or protesting human beings intrude.

The caucus room is a mess. It's crowded, stuffy and littered with incriminating documents, stale secrets, empty coffee cups, and exhausted outrage.

The audience, mostly young, is jammed into every available inch of space at the back. They look down on the witness, and the President would not care for that.

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AT THE long table in front sit six Senators, only one a friend. The others are written off as Democrats or Republicans who faithfully failed to respond to manipulation.

But he'd better come. His survival may depend on it.

Something has happened at the hearings, some point of fatigue, strain and ugliness has been reached where action is required by the man who cannot, to use John Dean's word, "contain" Watergate.

It is now no longer a question of whether the President knew on September 15 or on March 21 what was really going on.

The President is no longer just bracketed between John Dean's accusations and his own denials. He is bracketed by the accusations of two Senators.

In the morning of his worst day, Mr. Nixon was indicted by Chairman Sam Ervin for ignoring the Constitution, quite

apart from Watergate. In the afternoon, Senator Lowell Weicker, the maverick Republican from Connecticut, virtually read him out of the Republican Party.

Weicker brought the hearings to the highest moment of drama and emotion when, after reciting the sins of the White House against him, he cried out "enough."

With Dean no longer at issue, sitting calmly before him, Weicker reviewed his grievances—the threats and smears from the President's men that have continued to this day.

Weicker introduced evidence that was as damaging as anything that John Dean said in a week of testimony. He brought out a transcript of a tape recording of a phone conversation between John Ehrlichman and former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst. It was March 28, when the end was near, and they were plotting at the President's request, Ehrlichman said, to stop Weicker.

Kleindienst said, "Baker's (Senator Howard H. Baker Jr.) had a long talk with him and told him to shut up and he said he would."

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WHAT THE recorded telephone call showed was that even with destruction staring them in the face, they were still at it, still trying to bend men out of shape; and this week the ubiquitous Charles Colson was spreading a story that Weicker had unreported campaign funds.

That is why Richard Nixon must present himself. H. R. Haldeman and Ehrlichman can come and deny every word John Dean said. But only the President can say that he is sorry and chastened and that he has learned. He'd better say it soon. The hearings are out of control.

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