

President Nixon's use of the tape recordings of his White House conversations is growing ever stranger, serving only to erode further the bulwark of Presidential responsibility and dignity behind which he has sought refuge.

While taking the extreme position before courts and Congress that none of the tapes "has been transcribed or made public and none will be," Mr. Nixon was at the same time giving one of the principals in the Watergate morass the opportunity to use the tapes in his own defense.

After only the most perfunctory gesture of reticence about the content of these recordings, H. R. Haldeman proceeded to give to the Ervin committee interpretations convenient to himself and the President of what occurred at critical White House meetings. As Senator Ervin remarked, this move seems akin to the old technique of leaking whatever information would help your argument, and suppressing the rest as "classified."

Mr. Nixon has now undercut his claim—dubious even from the start—that his central responsibility was to keep Presidential records inviolate. He has himself permitted their use by his partisans, while invoking abstract rectitude to keep them away from his critics. This, as Mr. Ehrlichman would say, just will not wash.

The President is on record as conceding that the content of the recordings can be interpreted in different ways by persons of "different perspectives and motivations." That being the case—and, as we have previously indicated, we fully believe it to be so—Mr. Nixon can gain no points in credibility by seeing that only his own interpretation is made available.

Those who are so quick to point out difficulties for the Watergate prosecutor allegedly caused by the Senate's televised hearings are strangely silent about the far greater difficulties posed by the withholding of material evidence from independent scrutiny.

Publication of these tapes will probably not give full satisfaction to one side or another in this conflict. It will almost certainly neither prove guilt nor confirm innocence; the transcripts of other conversations among Watergate principals already in the public domain make clear how such exchanges can be variously interpreted. Release of the Presidential tapes is not likely to solve all the problems in dispute, and perhaps none of them. But their continued suppression is not solving any of these problems; it is only compounding the crisis closing in on the President.