

Watergate Response: A TV Spectacular?

Preparing his answer to the Watergate charges, President Nixon is even more isolated, if that is possible, than in the recent past. As a high ranking Republican with at least limited access puts it, "President Nixon is conferring with President Nixon and almost no one else."

When and how he will respond perhaps, at this stage, even the President himself cannot say. Since the first phase of the Watergate hearings has continued beyond the August 3 recess of Congress, he could conceivably put off his response until some time in September.

Given his resourceful sense of timing, those with some slight access to the White House believe he will speak out when Congress is away. He may choose a limited form of press conference with representatives of the wire services and three television commentators. The guess, however, is that he will go all out in a hard charging television spectacular.

Indications are that opinion is beginning to turn against the Watergate committee with the press accused of overplaying the scandals to "get Nixon." Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey (D-Minn.) reports that 60 per cent of his mail takes this line; others on Capitol Hill report a similar shift from anti- to pro-Nixon. The public opinion polls continue to show an increase in the President's disapproval rating.

Against this background, the President can don the martyr's robe and make a highly emotional appeal for sympathy. This would accord with the

10-year cycle of Nixon crises that have marked his rise and fall and rise again.

The greatest test came in 1952 when newspapers exposed the fact that as a senator he accepted a private fund from wealthy California businessmen to supplement his Senate salary. He had been nominated as the running mate with Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower. With the furor over the secret fund blowing up in blacker and blacker headlines, powerful figures in the Republican Party, including Thomas E. Dewey, twice previously the standard bearer, urged that he be dropped. Nixon's political career seemed about to end in disgrace with no word from Eisenhower.

Then, as now, Nixon isolated himself from all but two or three intimate associates. One was William P. Rogers who became Attorney General in the Eisenhower administration and is presently Secretary of State. With only ominous silence from Eisenhower Nixon got television time to make his famous Checkers speech. In a highly emotional performance, the vice presidential candidate defended his right to accept the gift of a spaniel named Checkers and virtuously extolled his wife for her "good cloth coat"—a sideswipe at the charge of mink coat giveaways in the Truman administration.

The performance drew a half million letters and telegrams, virtually all favorable. Thoughtful observers were appalled at what they considered the demagoguery of the speech. Walter Lippmann wrote that he felt as though

he had heard a resort to lynch law. But it turned the tide with Eisenhower. Nixon went from California to West Virginia where Ike was campaigning. In a private meeting Eisenhower embraced him and called him "my boy." Nixon wept.

Ten years later there was another emotional outburst with a sad ending. Defeated for governor of California by Edmund G. (Pat) Brown, Nixon insisted on facing the assembled press and denouncing them with the conclusion "You won't have Richard Nixon to kick around any more." Standing beside him, Mrs. Nixon could hardly restrain her tears.

The script for a television spectacular on Watergate writes itself. He will be surrounded by his devoted family, conspicuously including his patient wife who has seen him through those other emotional traumas. Every stop will be pulled out by a master of crowd appeal: innuendo, sympathy for a beleaguered President who has done no wrong. If this is the format, it will be no answer to Watergate but it could very well bring a wave of public support as happened in the Checkers spectacular.

The President, according to reports from the White House, expects to spend most of August in San Clemente. The brooding figure on the Pacific shore will be contemplating a future in which there is no thought whatsoever of retreat. Out of the emotional tension, the deep half subconscious drive, he means to bring a new victory,