

Royce Brier.....

Something About The Nixon Speech

IT IS THE CONCENSUS of critics of President Nixon that he did not say anything "new" in his Watergate address to the nation Wednesday night.

Perhaps typical of this dubiety is that of Senator Edward Brooke, (R-Mass.): "The President did not answer . . . with specifics. We wanted facts, and he gave us rhetoric."



It is true that with an exception to be noted, there was nothing substantially new in the speech. The President asserted his innocence, which was not new. He denied implication in the Watergate break-in and in the subsequent cover-up, also not new. He gave a March date for his first realization of the gravity of Watergate, still not new.

But if the critics and all the people expected him to rebut, item by item, the charges and suspicions lodged against him, they were expecting the impossible. The charges and suspicions at this stage are too tenuous to support a thorough substantive rebuttal.

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THAT IS, if one raises suspicion against your conduct, but fails to produce evidence for it, what answer have you but a plea of innocence? You are not required to do more in a court of justice under our system.

And the court in this case is a vast, amorphous body consisting in a Senate committee taking testimony, yet unfinished, a Grand Jury, hundreds talking to the news media, and last the whole people sitting in judgment which, in our society, is their duty and their right.

This is not to say Mr. Nixon's address was a satisfactory solution of the national problem, or of his own problem of restoring the Presidency to its traditional character in leadership and trust.

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WE, READING AND SEEING the Ervin committee record, can hardly aver we understand its multiplicities. One cannot recall in our history a national issue so gorged in complexities, unless it was the secession-slavery issue over a century ago.

What will we say of the witness, Dean, whom the President designated as his only true accuser? But what will we say of the witnesses, Haldeman and Ehrlichman, who defended the President's innocence, but with equally apocryphal testimony?

Even granting the elusive nature of the target, the President's address was hardly a model of logic and concision. His endeavor to blame last year's eruption of anti-war dissent for his dilatory perception of aWtergate, seemed irrelevant, and the time he devoted to the tapes dispute was at least digressive.

A chronological statement of Watergate development by dates was issued simultaneously. This was probably unfortunate, since many citizens would never see the statement or relate it to the speech.

Altogether, the President seems to face another, and better-organized, exposition of his Watergate position, and it is doubtful if it can be achieved on the air short of some marathon presentation, which could be self-limiting in effective communication with the people.

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