



President Nixon On Watergate

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THE PRESIDENT has said his say about the Watergate horror, and one must wait to see the signs of the country's response to him. The evidence is pretty strong already that most people feel they have already heard enough about Watergate and allied misdeeds. Hence President Nixon stands a reasonable chance of a friendly national response, over-all.

If that is the outcome, the Senate will hear about it from the grass roots soon enough, and in that event, we may shortly see the end of the most perilous phase of the Watergate exposure. One must add that this phase of sustained attack on the President and the presidency has been perilous for no sort of moral reason.

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BUT THE response to the speech is in the future. For the present, it is more worth noting that this endlessly re-drafted address by Mr. Nixon bore quite visible traces of the prolonged conflict among the President's most trusted remaining advisers.

The conflict has been about what stance the President ought to adopt under the perpetual drumfire of accusation and attack. The majority of his present staff members have always favored a moderate, patient, above-the-battle stance. The main outlines of Wednesday's speech clearly followed the blueprint of this group.

But there have been others, notably among the congressional rightwingers and the President's own circle of private

friends, who have repeatedly urged him to "come" out swinging with both fists." The main trace of this was to be found in the reference to unauthorized wire-tapping in previous administrations.

On this subject, we have heard a lot of high-toned preaching from people who should know better, if they know anything whatever about the life in Washington. The President is of course right that the practice now so loudly condemned in the Nixon Administration was quite as common in all four of the previous administrations since World War II.

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IT CANNOT have been easy for Mr. Nixon to be publicly portrayed as a monster of iniquity for doing precisely what his most admired predecessors had also done, and sometimes on a far larger, more surprising scale. It cannot have been easy for him, either, to hear the indignant but grossly ill-informed denials that this could possibly have been true.

Then, too, whatever you may think about Watergate, you have to face the fact if you are honest about such matters, that Mr. Nixon has suffered from what he must regard as an unfair double standard. Think of this Nixonian Bay of Pigs, for instance, as against what happened in 1961 and what was then said about it.

If the recent speech does not produce the results the President wants, he will use all the awe-inspiring resources of his office to "come out swinging with both fists."