

# Charles Gould

## Watergate Opinion

In his TV address last week, President Nixon said nothing about Watergate that he has not said before.

His critics see this as a point of weakness in his defense. I see it as a point of strength.

He has consistently said he did not have advance knowledge of the Watergate break-in.

He has consistently said he did not have knowledge of the cumbersome attempts at a coverup.

His critics, however, have pre-judged him. They would have been satisfied with nothing less than a confession of guilt.

I believe the President is telling the truth. I also believe he is correct in suggesting that the Watergate investigation be conducted in the courts.

Due process is a primary judicial plank in our Constitution. We have a carefully structured system of laws to insure fair and just trials. We should use that system.

The Ervin committee is not a court of law. It was not constituted to establish the guilt or innocence of any individual. It was constituted for the purpose of determining the extent of unfair campaign practices in the 1972 Presidential election.

It was further charged with responsibility for proposing legislation to prevent such acts in the future.

The hearings have strayed far from these goals.

Under the hypnotic influence of the television cameras, the elite committee has at times employed some of the unsavory tactics of a kangaroo court.

Despite his pious preachments, Senator Ervin has sometimes acted like a ringmaster at a lynching bee.

Thus far, 35 witnesses have paraded before the committee. They have been permitted to use rumors, innuendos, speculations and hear-say in their testimony.

Many of these witnesses were fighting

for survival. Each might have strengthened his own chances by incriminating the President. Only one did. John Dean.

Dean's testimony was in conflict in some degree with all witnesses who preceded him and all who followed him.

Thus, the weight of evidence — if the cluttered mass of undisciplined testimony can be so classified — supports the President's innocence in this sorry matter.

A review of 1972 press clippings provides further support. A mountain of news reports shows that Mr. Nixon was almost continuously involved last year in a series of global challenges of major magnitude.

- His historic journey to Peking.
- His momentous meetings in Moscow.
- His highly sensitive — and successful efforts to negotiate an honorable peace agreement with Hanoi.

The President's dedication to the resolution of these important and time-consuming matters did not escape the attention of his critics.

He was charged with failing to respond to the campaign speeches of Democratic candidate George McGovern.

He was condemned for placing his reelection responsibilities in the hands of aides and surrogates.

In the light of Watergate, these criticisms seem warranted.

Had Mr. Nixon personally supervised his 1972 campaign instead of spear-heading a massive program of global fence-mending, he could have killed the rash of ill-conceived adventures that have been exposed in the Watergate hearings.

But at what price? Would we still be fighting in Vietnam? Would Hanoi still hold our POWs? Would the door to mainland China still be closed? Would the cold war with Russia still continue?

---

Guy Wright is on vacation