

Editor's Report

Watergate In Perspective

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Readers of this column know that whoever holds the man-killing job of President of the United States has my automatic sympathy, and automatically gets all the support that honestly can be extended here. This rule has prevailed ever since these writings began back in the early '50s.



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your sympathetic respect, and in most cases, I think, your admiration.

For 50 minutes he stood exposed to a merciless sun and a merciless inquisition the like of which no other president has ever had to face. Every question

--Turn to Page B2, Col. 7

--From Page 1

on Watergate, many painfully antagonistic and some actually insulting, was immediately and forcefully answered. He was in total charge of himself and the situation.

Even the reporters who had been trying to trap him, who had privately been hoping he would fall on his face, were forced to admit admiration. Which makes you wonder why a man who can handle himself so well under incredible pressure waited as long as he did to undergo an inevitable confrontation.

By making himself a veritable Howard Hughes-type hermit for more than five months, Mr. Nixon did himself a grave disservice. Maybe, hopefully, the favorable public response to his performance at San Clemente will lead to regular and frequent press conferences in the future. It should — for his benefit and the welfare of the nation.

The President's replies, of course, did not halt the hue and cry of the forces determined to wreck him and his administration. They are going to continue to lambaste him at whatever cost to national stability, and despite the sickening irrationality of magnifying the negative and minimizing the positive.

I, for one, have always felt that Watergate essentially is a great flap about very little. So do a lot of other people who appreciate what the President has done for peace in Hanoi, Moscow and Peking.

To help restore the perspective on Watergate which has been turned upside-down by months of partisan uproar — a restoration which the President naturally is striving for — I want to offer here today some comments by a witty and astute British writer.

He is A. J. P. Taylor, an erudite and veteran observer of world affairs for the London Daily Express, the major newspaper property of the late Lord Beaverbrook. This paper, which is anything but reactionary, is now being run by his son who is my best friend in the field of English journalism, Sir Max Aitken.

With the permission of United Features Syndicate, which acts as agent for the Express in this country, the following comments on Watergate by Mr. Taylor are recommended for your consideration. Remember they were written for an audience of completely objective Britishers.

I do not want to read another word about Watergate. Scandals involving politicians are always enjoyable, far more so than scandals about, say, literary men. But they must be real scandals — scandals about vast financial coups or fantastic and unlikely sexual activities.

But what is Watergate about? So far as I can understand, nothing at all. Certainly not about anything that shocks or even amuses me.

Some hired men of the Republican Party proposed to listen in to the affairs of the Democrats' National Committee. They therefore bugged a room in the Watergate Hotel.

That is all. You don't believe it? You must. It is true. In a sense this redounds to the credit of the American people. If they can get really worked up over Watergate and the whole affair is not a fabrication of imaginative journalists, the Americans must be extremely innocent.

Suppose the Watergate affair had happened in this country? Who would have cared? As Watergate drags on its weary way I have been waiting to be told what the buggers learned or hoped to learn. There has never been the slightest hint that they ever learned anything or that there was anything to learn.

If Labour headquarters were permanently wired to Conservative headquarters and the other way around it would not make the slightest difference to our political life except that it would be a relief for each party to listen to each other's bores instead of to their own.

So far as I am concerned the congressional committee can go droning on and on. Witnesses can produce their allegedly sensational evidence. Senator Ervin, aged 76, can make still more foolish blunders. But it is all a dead story without life or interest.

Yet there is a serious point involved. The United States of America count for a great deal in the world. Despite some ambitious rivals, such as Russia and China, they are still the greatest power in the world and the one that offers the greatest promise for the future.

What is more, the U.S. have a damned good President, or had until recently. Nixon has done things that were beyond the much praised John Kennedy and certainly beyond the late Lyndon B. Johnson.

Who showed that the Cold War was nonsense? Who ended its more than 20 years by his personal initiative? None other than Richard Nixon. And he did not play off China against Soviet Russia. He secured friendship and reconciliation with both.

Look around on the statesmen of the past half century and ask: Who has done most for the peace of the world? There is a clear answer: Richard Nixon.

And this is the man who has to be smeared and pilloried because some junior Republican officials, maybe with his consent, were curious to know what went on at Democratic meetings.

I say to all Americans, including those many academics who write high minded letters to the New York Times: "PACK IT IN." We have really had enough. We do not care who bugged whom at Watergate. We do not care who knew and who didn't.

President Nixon himself cannot escape the American atmosphere. Even he takes Watergate seriously and is upset by it. But let him take heart. No one outside America cares about Watergate in the slightest.

If you want a real juicy scandal, rejoice that you are an Englishman. When it comes to scandal, we are still the tops.

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And that's the message for today.

Thank you, Mr. Taylor, for helping correct a perspective on Watergate which has been cockeyed for far too long a time in our country.

As President Nixon keeps repeating, this nation must now press ahead on matters which are really important to its future — and to the future of humanity itself.