One of Grover Cleveland's campaign slogans was: "We love him for the enemies he has made." In a sense, that slogan sums up Richard Nixon's basic political technique. It has some of the days of Alger Hiss and Helen Gahagan Douglas. As the tone and thrust of his press conference made clear, the President, even more than ever before, is relying on his enemies to rescue him from the trap in which he finds himself.

The press conference was the first real test for the President in many long months, and it came in the nick of time. The President had planned a three-stage comeback attempt. The first stage was his nationally televised apology on Watergate. It flopped. The flop was recognized even by the President and his staff. The President had a wholly defensible case to make about the "secret bombing" of Cambodia. But instead of making his case in a rational and sensible way, he took part in the Watergate press corps knows. The President's recapitulation of the media is just as deep and just as real. The press has good reasons for feeling as it does. But so, from his own angle vision—does the President.

It is interesting, though risky, to try to see the President's situation as it must appear through his eyes. When he says that he did not know about the Watergate cover-up until March, he is probably telling what seems to him the simple truth.

The Ervin committee testimony made one thing clear. In his approach to Watergate, Nixon had a lot in common with the people who refuse to consult the doctor about that queer chest pain or that mysterious lump, because they don't want to be told what it means. The President very much didn't want to be told what Watergate meant, which is why he is telling what seems to him the truth.

Yet, two-thirds of his compatriots, according to the polls, do not believe that he is telling the truth. They believe that he took part in the Watergate cover-up, and thus was guilty of a felony. In the President's eyes, this no doubt sounds grossly unfair, and the press unfairness cannot of course be blamed on "the enemies he has made," above all those relentless enemies in the media.

To the presidential enemies, this may appear further evidence of Nixon's paranoia. But as Henry Kissinger has remarked in jest, "even paranoids have real enemies," and Nixon's enemies are entirely real. He must sometimes ask himself the plaintive question of Louis XVI: "What have I done that they should hate me so?"

It is an interesting question. Lyndon Johnson was hated too ("Hey, hey, LBJ. How many kids have you killed today?"). and so was Franklin Roose-velt ("a traitor to his class"). There were solid reasons for this hatred—in Johnson's case, the Vietnam war, in Roosevelt's, the transfer of real power from Wall Street to Washington. It is much more difficult to define the reasons for the hatred of Nixon, which of course existed long before Watergate.

Far more than in the case of Johnson or Roosevelt, it seems to relate to personality more than policy, to manner more than matter. One can dimly understand the combined sense of outrage and insecurity that the sense of being at sea in a sea of hatred must generate in the President. One can also understand why the Cleveland slogan has become Richard Nixon's basic campaign theme. He has reached out beyond "the enemies he has made" to build a solid constituency "out there," to borrow White's most recent and best book. The technique is not new—Franklin Roosevelt's grinding of the "sirs"—angry enough to convince a lot of citizens that the Press is indeed "out to get" the President. Nixon himself emphasized this theme, when he talked of the "great number of people in this country that didn't accept the mandate of 1972," who would "prefer that I fail." Among these people included "some members of the press, perhaps, some members of the television, perhaps... Those qualifying "somes" and "perhapses" were not, and were not meant to be, convincing. The "members of the television," in short, number very prominently among those useful "enemies he has made." Further face-downs between the President and the angry press can be confidently predicted, now that the President has discovered how easy it is to win such seemingly one-sided battles.

The battles are not charades. The detestation of Nixon by most of the press is deep and real, as anyone who has any contact with the Washington press corps knows. The President's resentment of the media is just as deep and just as real. The press has good reasons for feeling as it does. But so, from his own angle vision—does the President.

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