

NOV 11 1973

# Watergate Baffles E. Europe

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WARSAW, Nov. 10—The Watergate affair has prompted mounting concern in East European capitals about President Nixon's political survival and speculation as to the effect his possible removal from office could have on East-West detente.

Senior and middle-level officials are now suggesting privately that the sensation-studded affair may have eroded Mr. Nixon's authority beyond repair. The principal concern of these officials is what effect will this have on American foreign policy.

One official—a member of the ruling body of a Warsaw Pact country—confided recently that until mid-October "We were pretty sure that Nixon would survive Watergate, but we are not so sure any more."

The official, who insisted that his name not be disclosed, said, "the most important question" is whether Mr. Nixon's policy of detente would survive.

"Watergate," he said "is America's 20th Party Congress"—a reference to the 1956 congress in Moscow, when the late Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev launched his de-Stalinization campaign by detailing to leading party officials Stalin's crimes and abuses of power. "That was a tortuous road, as you know," he added.

Publicly, however, all Soviet bloc governments have refrained from commenting on the Watergate affair and they have imposed a near-total news blackout on all Watergate news.

Despite the blackout, Watergate has become a household word in East European intellectual circles. With disbelief and skepticism, intellectuals in Warsaw, Prague and Budapest are trying to decipher the latest news spread through rumor mills or heard over Western radio stations. Who is trying to impeach Nixon? Why? What's so terrible about Watergate?

Mr. Nixon's popularity may be at its lowest point in the United States, but throughout Eastern Europe he is regarded as a great President whose vision and courage in foreign policy ended the Cold War.

Conversations about Watergate can provoke long, heated arguments.

"What's Watergate?" a 19-year-old Prague student argued recently. "The Americans have no idea about it. I do—I have lived in Watergate all my life."

To buttress his point, the student and his female companion unloaded a lengthy, sad tale of misfortunes their parents suffered during the Stalinist terror.

How can the Watergate break-in and its subsequent coverup compare with the mind-boggling arbitrariness of

Stalinist regimes, he asked. Didn't President Nixon, after all, back down and fire his closest associates?

By and large, East Europeans have reduced the political and constitutional complexities of the Watergate scandal to a crude conception of a party struggle—a President hounded by his political opponents over minor issues.

This is not just the view of those without access to news about the United States; it is also prevalent among the ruling elite, who receive information about current world events through special daily bulletins prepared for top- and medium-level officials by government news agencies.

On the official level, all Warsaw Pact governments have welcomed Mr. Nixon's rapprochement with the Soviet Union. The detente forced Moscow to grant its allies greater room for maneuver, particularly in commercial relations with the West. Since Moscow was dealing with the principal Western powers, the other Warsaw Pact countries were permitted to likewise.

Officials—many of whom have staked their political careers on detente—are now concerned about any changes in Washington that could affect

U. S. foreign policy (and not for the better, from their viewpoint).

On the unofficial level, most East Europeans have experienced some concrete and tangible benefits from Mr. Nixon's detente. They are living better, their governments have become somewhat less restrictive and, most importantly, there are hopes that things may improve as the East-West climate warms up.

A middle-aged Polish scientist put it this way:

"We can't understand what's happening in America. Our press is silent, but we hear that the entire government is under investigation. Ministers are fired. The vice president is convicted. Even Nixon is being attacked.

"Nixon is popular here. Any American President would be popular here. There is a vast reservoir of pro-American feelings among the Polish people. There are ethnic and cultural ties, you know.

"But we are really worried about our future. When America is sick we feel the effects of it. Detente is such a fragile development. But we can't do a thing. We live in the shadow of the superpowers, and we hope that they don't revert to Cold War ways."