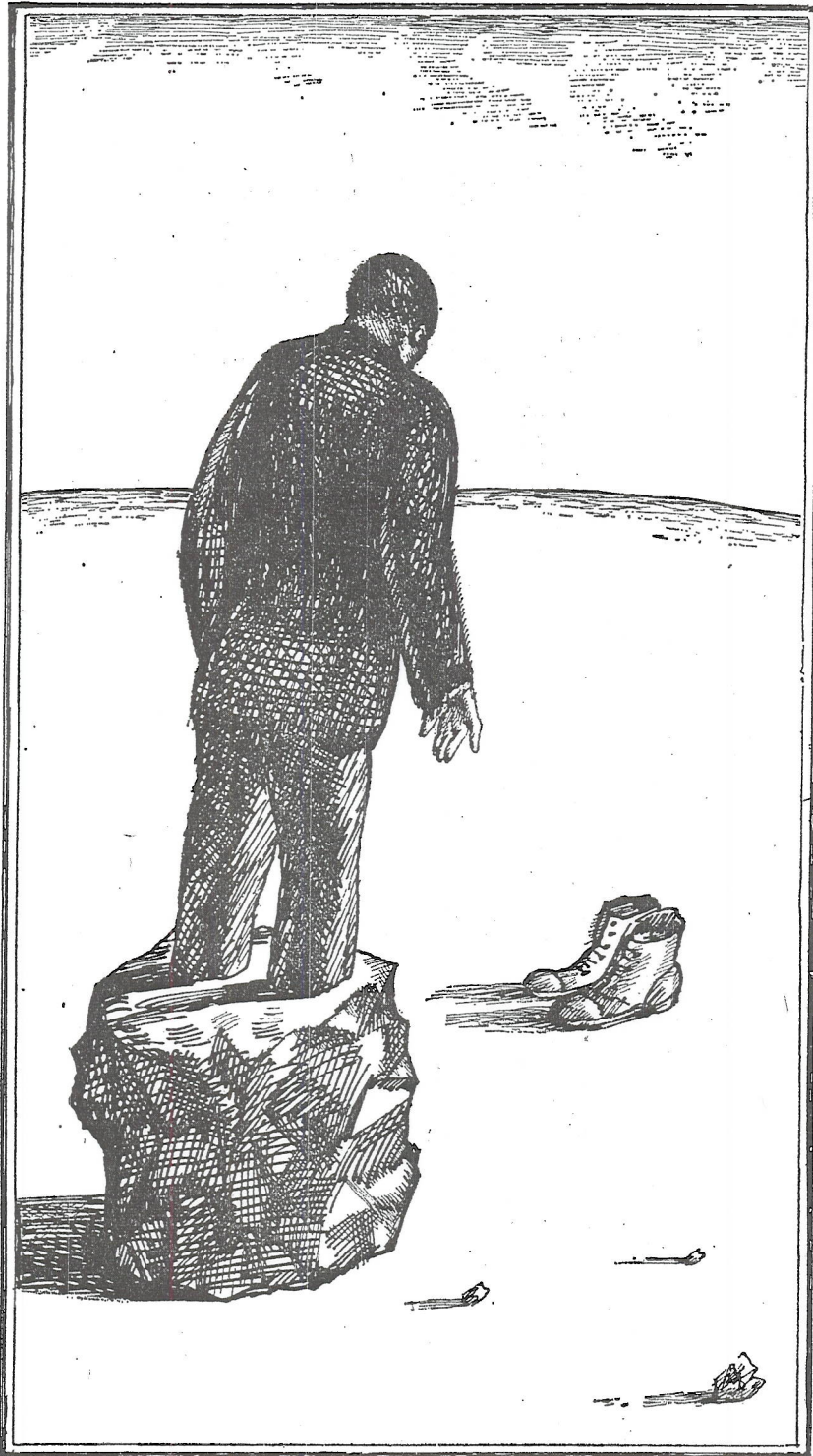


A Plea for Fairness to Mr. Nixon



Eugene Mihaesco

By Philip C. Clarke

WASHINGTON — Let's assume that President Nixon, horrified at first learning of the Watergate fiasco, yielded to the very human instinct to try to brush it off, hoping it would all blow over. Let's assume also that in so doing he went along too long with high advisers grown arrogant and corruptible through excessive power.

Having properly denounced such aberrations, let us now reflect and ask: Is the crime of Watergate worth the destroying of a President and the shattering of a nation? For make no mistake: This is happening.

To be sure, Watergate was a thoroughly reprehensible though ludicrous

affair. And it's no excuse to argue that the Democrats might have attempted similar skulduggery, given the means and the money. But does the punishment really fit the crime?

Was the treasury robbed? Was anyone maimed or murdered, much less drowned? Are not the various special prosecutors, grand juries and committees of Congress sufficient to bring the criminally guilty to justice? And have not the President, his family and his friends suffered humiliation enough?

If so, then why this apparent obsession on the part of some to keep Congress and the news media forever in an uproar over Watergate? Is it because of moral indignation alone—or is it partisan politics and the pursuit

of a personal vendetta?

Indeed, the outcry over Watergate resembles nothing so much as the baying of hounds closing in for the kill of a wounded quarry. Clearly, the enemies of Mr. Nixon, old and new, sense blood and are out to "get" him and finish him off at last.

With unconcealed glee, they anticipate the repayment of old debts and new, from Alger Hiss and the "pumpkin papers" to Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers. And of course, there is that score to settle over the President's vituperative, former media-baiter, Spiro T. Agnew.

Supporters of Franklin D. Roosevelt used to say they were for him because of his enemies. The same might now be said for Mr. Nixon. It is noteworthy that his principal enemies are the same "liberals" who hounded Lyndon Johnson from office because of his commitment to the defense of South Vietnam and who scorn those they consider square, WASPish and naively patriotic, including, of course, the "silent majority."

So deep, so unrestrained is the hostility of the Nixon-haters that they would risk wrecking the Republic to destroy their man. Before allowing this to happen, it is only fair for Americans to weigh against Watergate accomplishments of the Administration.

There is agreement, certainly, that he extricated the United States from the morass of Vietnam without sacrificing our national honor and integrity or, as yet, the freedom and independence of South Vietnam. Most assuredly, he and the celebrated Henry A. Kissinger achieved the near impossible by opening a dialogue with the most populous and frequently most hostile nation on earth, the People's Republic of China. There has been at least an attempt at détente with the Soviet Union (albeit on the Soviet Union's part more form than substance), and the beginnings of a search for safety from nuclear confrontation and mutual annihilation. And we are now witnessing the first hopeful results of the bold and energetic initiative to defuse the explosive Middle East.

In the context of history, these are not mean achievements. Indeed, they are worthy of recognition and appreciation.

Above all, it is time to ask Congress and the critics whether the public interest is better served by pursuing Watergate and Richard M. Nixon to the bitter end, or by concluding that enough is enough and by getting on with the urgent business of the nation and the world.

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