

The Liberals' Contribution to Watergate

By Jeffrey St. John

"The expansion and abuse of Presidential power" observes the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., in "The Imperial Presidency," "constituted the underlying issue, the issue that, as we have seen, Watergate raised to the surface...."

Professor Schlesinger, like many liberals favoring impeachment, refuses to face the rational remedy to prevent future abuse of Presidential power and thus forestall future Watergates. The remedy is for liberals to renounce the cherished and dangerous dogma that the Government should dictate the nation's social and economic life. For Watergate was partly the consequence of Congress having granted enormous economic powers to the President.

The respected pollster and political analyst Samuel Lubell, in his critique of the 1972 Presidential campaign, pointed out that it was "the overloaded economic powers in the White House that swept away traditional political restraints" and allowed Nixon campaign aides to manipulate the election.

Blackmail and extortion of huge and often illegal campaign contributions from United States corporations either doing business with or controlled by government were the results of the liberal compulsion for economic dictatorship.

Congress, therefore, shares considerable complicity in Watergate, particularly for the unlimited power it has

turned over to the President to manage the economy by wage and price controls. The trend is continuing, with such economic problems as the energy crisis turned over to the President, who is given *carte blanche* powers, even though a growing number in the House and Senate favor Mr. Nixon's impeachment on the grounds that he abused the powers previously granted by Congress!

Another illustration of this trend is the current consideration by Congress of the brainchild inspired by Ralph Nader, the Consumer Protection Agency. The proposed agency would be granted unprecedented powers to protect consumers, but at what political and tax costs? According to the non-partisan Tax Foundation, the Federal Government currently administers 1,000 consumer programs in 57 Government agencies at an annual cost of \$3 billion. But equally important, since the agency would be a new arm of the executive branch, political control of a Consumer Protection Agency would be vested in the White House staff.

Mr. Nader and his allies in Congress have decry the Watergate scandal in general and corporate campaign contributions in particular—contributions, for example, from the Associated Milk Producers, Inc., and other companies and industries that are either subsidized or controlled by past acts of Congress and administered by the executive.

But Mr. Nader and his allies refuse to face the underlying cause of political corruption connected with corpo-

rations. Instead, they push for more political control over the private economy and advocate Federal financing of elections, which would place even greater powers in the hands of the Government.

"The furor over private financing," asserts a Yale law professor, Ralph Winter Jr., in a study for the American Enterprise Institute, "is likely to obscure one of the few clear lessons of Watergate—the lesson that unchecked discretion to bestow or give away economic favors permits Government officials to wield arbitrary power. Only imposition of controls on the exercise of that power can solve the underlying evil."

In recent months, two prominent members of the Administration have offered similar views. Treasury Secretary George P. Shultz asserted last November that Watergate not only bore out Lord Acton's admonition that "power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," but confirmed the conservative contention that the stronger a government the more corrupt it will become.

Echoing this theme, Presidential adviser Patrick Buchanan in a speech in January pointed out that those liberals now decrying Watergate were those very same individuals in the nineteenthies who termed conservative opposition to expansion of Government power "timid and negative."

Mr. Buchanan believes, moreover, that only a renunciation of the notion by liberals that political power can solve social and economic problems

will bring about genuine reform and prevent future Watergates. "For politicians to promise," he states, "that this or that program is the answer to the age-old problem of poverty or malnutrition or bigotry is to mislead and deceive, to add to the eventual disillusionment and distrust of the political process, to draw down upon the limited remaining moral capital of government."

A measure of this distrust and the declining moral capital of the political process is found in recent opinion surveys that show as low a public regard for Congress as the executive. Nevertheless, Congress continues to concentrate more power in the executive, as illustrated by the Senate's refusal to scuttle wage and price controls. It is the height of political hypocrisy and intellectual dishonesty for members of Congress to demand impeachment of the President on the grounds of "abuse of power" when it is some of those same legislators who vote for retention of Presidential powers or their expansion by the creation of new agencies.

Congressmen must examine their own consciences and actions if they are really to deal with the problem of abuse of Presidential power. What is required of them is an end to the current and unrecognized form of political racketeering that guarantees future corruption in government.

Jeffrey St. John is a news commentator on radio and television and a syndicated columnist.