

'Charges... Totally False'

Following are excerpts from President Nixon's televised question-and-answer session before the Executives' Club of Chicago:

Q. Mr. President, you've said on many occasions that you are willing to cooperate with the special prosecutor and Congress in this Watergate situation, but going beyond a certain point might tend to weaken the future constitutional relationship between the presidency and Congress. Now I agree, but I think there's a great deal of confusion among the public and maybe not enough of a point made, and I wonder if you would care to make a few additional comments on that point.

A: Well, first with regard to cooperation, as you probably are aware, we have cooperated with the Rodino committee, the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, by my directing that all of the materials that were furnished to the special prosecutor have been turned over to the Judiciary Committee. That includes 19 tapes of confidential presidential conversations, an unprecedented turnover of confidential materials, over 700 documents, and in addition to that at the request of the committee we have turned over from five different executive departments and two agencies several case loads of documents covering Council decisions with regard to the price of hamburger to oil and import quotas.

The question now of course arises, is why not more, because the committee, or at least the staff members of the committee and the chairman of the committee, have indicated that they would like 42 more tapes, they would like more documents, and in addition to that they would like an index of every document in the White House over the past five years so that their staff can determine what other documents or other information they need in order to find out whether there is an impeachable offense.

Now first, being reasonable it seems to me would be that the committee should first examine what it has because Mr. Jaworski, the special prosecutor, said that he had what he considered to be the full story of Watergate. And we want the full story out. It's been before the special prosecutor, it is now before the committee.

Second, with regard to additional requests. There are those who, I think very logically, would raise the question, well, why not just give the members of the Judiciary Committee the right to come in and have all the tapes of every presidential conversation, a fishing license or a complete right to go in and go through all the presidential files in order to find out whether or not there is a possibility that some action had been taken which might be and might result in an impeachable offense.

The reason why we cannot go that far, the reason why we have gone probably as far as we have and even in going that far have weakened the office of the presidency, is very simply this: it isn't a question that the President has something to hide, it is that fact that every President, Democrat and Republican, from the founding of the Republic, has recognized the necessity of protecting the confidentiality of presidential conversations with his associates, with those who

come to see him, be they congressmen or senators or people from various parts of the country to give advice, and if that confidentiality principle is completely destroyed, future Presidents will not have the benefit of the kind of advice that an executive needs to make the right decisions. He will be surrounded by a group of eunuchs in so far as their advice is concerned, always fearful that some time in the future if they have given an opinion which turned out to be wrong that then they would be held responsible for it. Wrong—I'm not referring to being illegal—but wrong in terms of whether or not it worked.

In order to make the right decision, you have to have opinions expressed very freely, discussed very freely from a completely wide range. And it is that confidentiality that Presidents have fought for; that Jefferson fought for and other Presidents through the years. As far as I'm concerned I have cooperated with the special prosecutor, I will cooperate with the Rodino committee, not only by these turnover of documents that I have just referred to but also with regard to agreeing to answer any written interrogatories that they have under oath, agreeing to answer any questions that the chairman or the ranking member might have after they have looked over everything that we have turned over.

But when you come to the point of simply saying to a committee of Congress, without regard to relevancy, before they determine what they say is an impeachable offense, just come in and paw through the documents, it would lead to two things. One, it would delay the resolution of this matter for months and for that matter perhaps years, in my opinion, before they would get through it all. And as I said in my State of the Union address, I think one year of Watergate is enough.

When you find a situation . . . (Applause). But even, even more important than the delay is that if you erode the principle of confidentiality to the point that any adviser to a President or anybody who talks to a President does no assurance whatever that what he says will be kept in confidence, he isn't going to get the kind of advice, the kind of criticism, and we get a lot of that when people come into the office as well, that he needs to make the right decision. And as far as I'm concerned I will cooperate as fully as I possibly can to get a prompt and just resolution of this matter. And second, however, I will do nothing to weaken the office of the presidency. Because we need a strong President at this time rather than a weak one . . .

Q. Mr. President, forgetting all other considerations of whether the Watergate situation was or is a publicized or not, because it's still in the process of being litigated, do you not think that the entire incident has begun to affect the quality of life in this country, particularly the great deal of

uncertainties that people have about it, and also has begun to affect the concept of ethics, particularly in our young people. And for these reasons alone, would it not be better that you resign at this time and allow yourself the public forum, as a private citizen, to answer all accusations on all parts?

A. Now ladies and gentlemen, that's a perfectly proper question and it has been raised not only by the gentleman who asked it, but by several respected publications in this area as well as in other parts of the country, and some members of the Congress as well.

Let me respond to it first by saying that of course Watergate has had a disturbing effect, not only on young people but on other people. It was a wrong and very stupid action, to begin with. I have said that; I believe it now.

Second, as far as Watergate is concerned, it has been carried on, it has been, I believe, overpublicized, and a lot of charges have been made that, frankly, have proven to be false.

I'm sure that many people in this audience have read at one time or other, either in your news magazines, possibly in a newspaper, certainly heard on television and radio, such charges as this: that the President helped plan the Watergate thing before and had knowledge of it; that the President was informed of a cover-up on September 13 of 1973; that the President was informed that payments were being made on March 13, and that a blackmail attempt was being made on the White House on March 13, rather than on March 21, when I said was the first time those matters were brought to my attention; that the President had authorized the issuance of clemency or a promise of clemency to some of the defendants; and that the President had ordered the burglarizing—again, a very stupid act, apart from the fact of its being wrong and illegal—of Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in California.

Now all of those charges have been made. Many of the Americans—perhaps a majority—believe them.

They are all totally false, and the investigations will prove it. Whatever the Congress does—the tapes, etcetera—when they all come out, will establish that they are false.

The President learned for the first time on March 31, on March 21 of 1973, that a blackmail attempt was being made on the White House—not on March 13. The President learned for the first time at that time that payments had been made to the defendants, and let me point out that payments had been made.

But correcting what may have been a misapprehension when I spoke to the press on March 6 in Washington: it was *alleged* that the payments that had been made to the defendants were made for the purpose of keeping them still. However, Mr. Ehrlichman, Mr. Haldeman, Mr. Mitchell have all denied that that was the case and they certainly should be allowed the right in court to establish their innocence or guilt, without our concluding that that was the case.

But be that as it may, Watergate has hung over the country, and it continues to hang over the country. It will continue to as the Judiciary Committee continues its investigation, not with voluminous documents only that we have already presented to the special prosecutor, not only of all the material they have from the Ervin committee that has conducted months of hearings, and they have access to that; but in addition, scores of tapes and thousands of documents more, which would mean that not just one year, but two years or three years we're going to have this hanging over the country. That's why I want a prompt and just conclusion and will cooperate, as I indicated in answer to the first question, with the committee consistent with my responsibility to defend the office of the presidency to get that prompt and just conclusion.

Now under these circumstances, because the impression has been created, as you have very well indicated, doubts, mistrust to the President, I recognize that. Why doesn't the President resign? Because if the President resigned when he was not guilty of charges, then every President in the future could be forced out of office by simply leveling some charges and getting the media to carry them, and getting a few congressmen and senators, who were on the other side, to exploit them. Why doesn't the President resign because his popularity is low?

I already have referred to that question. Because if the time comes in this country when a President makes decisions based on where he stands in the polls rather than what is right or what is wrong, we'll have a very weak President. The nation and the world needs a strong President.

Now personally, I will say finally, from a personal standpoint resignation is an easy cop-out. Resignation, of course, might satisfy some of my good friendly partisans who would rather not have the problem of Watergate bothering them. But, on the other hand, apart from the personal standpoint, resignation of this President on charges of which he is not guilty, resignation simply because he happened to be low in the polls would forever change our form of government, it would lead to weak and unstable presidencies in the future and I will not be a party to the destruction of the presidency of the United States . . .

Q. Mr. President, regarding your comment that we must continue to move forward on the world front, the Wall Street Journal and the Chicago Sun-Times today both carry articles about mounting evidence that our foreign policy position with the Soviets, the Arabs, and our former European partners is now deteriorating. They say that the temporary suspension of the oil embargo is likely to be an on-again-off-again Soviet-Arab policy, and

that our declining influence abroad will lead to many problems at home and abroad including, continued rising prices for gasoline and many other basic necessities of life here at home. Would you please give us your comments?

A. Well, it's rather hard to respond to both of those publications in the small time that I have, but let me say first, early this year predictions were made that there would be a world-wide recession, you recall. And that was one of the reasons that people projected an 8 to 10 per cent unemployment in the United States at this time, which has not occurred. There will be apparently no world-wide recession, and second, there will be no recession in the United States. The difficulties are going to continue for a time, but in the second half of this year we expect to see the economy moving up, employment moving down and inflation abating.

As far as the entire situation world-wide is concerned, however, your question allows me to make a statement with regard not only to the Soviet Union but also with regard to Europe, which should be more on the front burner than it is because of the enormous importance of the European-American alliance to stability in the world.

I've already responded with regard to the Soviet Union and the Peoples' Republic of China. We have difficulties, we have differences, but it's far better to be talking about them rather than fighting about them and we will continue that policy.

Second, with regard to the Mideast. The Mideast has had four wars in a generation. That's four too many in an area that's very poor, and one that needs peace and needs it desperately. And at the present time the influence of the United States in the Mideast the fact that we have restored relations with Egypt, that we're moving on all of the areas of the Mideast for creating a permanent peace, is going to be one of the major legacies of this administration, I would hope.

Third, with regard to Europe. The problem there is complicated by the fact that our European friends—and we had agreed somewhat earlier that we would try on the 25th anniversary of NATO, which occurs in April, that we would try to reach common declarations on the security front with regard to the Atlantic Alliance and also on the economic and political front where the United States has to deal with what is called the Nine, or the European Common Market countries.

Now the progress in developing declarations on the security front has gone forward on schedule. However, I regret to report—as I have written to Chancellor Brandt, the present chairman of the Nine—I regret to report that on the economic and political front the progress has not gone forward and we face the situation that, therefore, if the heads of government were to meet at this time, for example in the month of April, we would simply be papering over difficulties and not resolving them.

But to just conclude the question with an observation for our European friends and for us. Let me say first, the European-American alliance is important to the peace of the world as well as to ourselves. The second point is, as far as security is concerned, the United States is indispensable to the security of Europe, not only our presence in Europe but also the fact of our nuclear strength.

Now, the Europeans cannot have it both ways. They cannot have the United States participation and cooperation on the security front and then proceed to have confrontation and even hostility on the economic and political front. And until the Europeans are willing to sit down and cooperate on the economic and political front, as well as on the security front, no meeting of heads of government should be scheduled.

I believe we will work out the cooperation. But I think it's very well for all nations in the world to understand that the day of the one-way street is gone. The United States has been very generous to its allies and friends and to its former enemies. We will continue to be as generous as we can.

But whether it's in the field of trade or whether it's in any other field, it is essential that we get what I would say a fair break for our producers just as we try to give a fair break to their producers. And we cannot have in Europe, for example, confrontation on the economic and political front and cooperation on the security front.

I do not mean to leave this question with the impression that the European and American alliance is shattered. It is not. I do indicate, however, that it is a time when Europeans as well as we must sit down and determine that we are either going to go along together on both the security and the economic and political fronts or we will go separately.

Because I can say one thing. I've had great difficulty in getting the Congress to continue to support American force in Europe at the level that we need to keep them there. In the event that Congress gets the idea that we are going to be faced with economic confrontation and hostility from the Nine, you will find it almost impossible to get congressional support for continued American presence at present levels on the security front.

Now we do not want this to happen. And that is why I have urged my friends in Europe, our friends in Europe, to consider this proposition. It doesn't mean that we are not going to have competition, but it does mean that we are not going to be faced with a situation where the nine countries of Europe gang up against the United States, the United States which is their guarantee for their security. That we cannot have.