

Twelve Months On

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, April 28—How much longer it seems. It is just a year since the speech that President Nixon hoped would still the tremors of Watergate but that in fact marked the beginning of the earthquake: his broadcast address of April 30, 1973.

"We must maintain the integrity of the White House," Mr. Nixon said. "And that integrity must be real, not transparent. There can be no white-wash at the White House . . ."

"As the new Attorney General I have today named Elliot Richardson, a man of unimpeachable integrity . . . I have given him absolute authority to make all decisions bearing upon the prosecution of the Watergate case and related matters . . . He has the authority to name a special supervising prosecutor . . . He will be fearless in pursuing this case wherever it leads."

There is much irony in reading that speech today. But we should do more than smile as we perceive how time has exposed the shameless cynicism of its promises. We should understand that its velvet words of cooperation and action closed a determined strategy of obstruction and delay—a strategy unchanged from then till now.

Mr. Nixon said he was "determined that we should get to the bottom of the matter and that the truth should be fully brought out no matter who was involved." He praised the activities of the Watergate grand jury and "a courageous judge, John Sirica," and said it was "essential that we let the judicial process go forward."

Those were the words. What he did was:

- Resist requests for evidence from the Special Prosecutor, Archibald Cox, and the grand jury.
- When the courts upheld the grand jury subpoena for documents and tapes, announced that he would not obey but would have Senator John Stennis verify an edited version.
- Fire Mr. Cox and force Mr. Richardson from office.
- When he was compelled to appoint a new Special Prosecutor, Leon Jaworski, resist or simply not answer his requests for evidence.

Suppose that Mr. Nixon had genuinely decided to tell the truth a year ago: the whole truth about burglaries and wiretapping and misuse of Federal agencies and attempts to buy Government favors. It would have been unpleasant, but I think he would have won credit for candor—and survived, his election mandate substantially intact.

But candor was not in him. The intensity and deviousness of his resistance to disclosure were fully measured

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in the White House maneuvers against Mr. Cox. That story has now been told in remarkable detail by Aaron Latham in New York Magazine. His article makes clear that the President and his aides were ready to use any device to be rid of the meddling prosecutor. The image that sticks is of Gen. Alexander Haig, the White House Chief of Staff, repeatedly telling Mr. Richardson to avoid rocking the boat during the Middle East war.

Now here we are replaying the familiar promises and the familiar devices in the setting of impeachment. A whole year on, and more than two months after the House Judiciary Committee's request for tapes and documents, the White House promises to produce edited evidence of what one unnamed aide says in an interview will be "the totality of the President's knowledge and actions."

That same anonymous voice, which sounds very much like General Haig's, warns against letting the Democrats "drag it out through the summer . . . It would be a tragedy," he said, "and would involve the full array of our relations with the Europeans, Soviets and other leaders."

If Mr. Nixon wanted to have the impeachment issue decided promptly, he would naturally have produced the evidence requested by the House Committee at once. If he had confidence in his innocence, he would have produced it all. For his talk of limiting disclosure to what he considers "relevant" is inside out. If he produced it all, and there was nothing to incriminate him, that would be a highly relevant fact. But proof of innocence can never be inferred from a less-than-complete disclosure.

Of course there is really no secret in what Mr. Nixon and his lawyers are about. They have sought from the start of the impeachment process to limit the evidence, arouse partisan division and above all play for time. It will doubtless be their aim now to argue for another month or two about the degree of compliance with the committee's subpoena.

Twist, deceive, evade, defy, provoke, divide: those are the tactics. No one should underestimate the difficulty that the House Committee faces in dealing with them. The jury's verdict in the Mitchell-Stans trial, and the fortuitous timing of that relatively weak case, will make things harder.

The committee is a diverse group of people, not born for heroism, but so far it has done its job despite difficult conditions. There is reason to hope that it will continue to resist diversions and press on to judgment.