

# A Closer Look at The Milk Muddle



**James Kilpatrick**

**T**HE LATEST CHARGE against President Nixon, churned up by a staff report from the Senate Watergate committee, is that the President accepted a bribe—that in return for a large pledge to his 1972 campaign, he granted the nation's dairymen in 1971 an increase in milk price supports.

The charge strikes me as spurious, but this should be said: If convincing evidence can be adduced under oath, proving that the President's action was directly conditioned upon the campaign pledge, we can forget all the other charges. If the bribery charge is true, Mr. Nixon ought to be impeached, tried, and ousted by sundown.

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**B**UT I HAVE returned to Mr. Nixon's own statement on the milk affair, released by the White House on January 8, and that statement still strikes me with the bell-like ring of truth. When the political wheeling-and-dealing of the milk producers is considered in sum, and when account is given to the whole nature of political contributions, the case against Mr. Nixon collapses.

Consider for a moment a not-so-hypothetical case. Let us suppose that a major aircraft company, through its executives, makes large contributions to the campaign of a United States senator. On a crucial vote, involving millions of dollars in contracts, the senator votes with the company's position.

Is this a "bribe"? Are the contributions and the vote directly linked? Or would the senator have acted as he did out of personal conviction, or from sheer political self-interest?

In his January statement, Mr. Nixon made no bones about his own motivation. He overruled his secretary of agriculture, and granted the higher price support, for largely political reasons. He feared a Democrat-controlled Congress would vote the price increase if he failed to grant it by executive order. The Democrats would thus gain favor with the milk producers, and Mr. Nixon would offend a "vital political constituency."

The President also believed—correctly, as it turned out—that the public interest would be well served by the higher support price. The Senate staff aides who prepared the recent leaked report said the higher price was "worth hundreds of millions of dollars to the industry—and costing the same amount to the government and consumers."

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**T**HAT STATEMENT is a nice combination of demagoguery and falsehood. Outlays for milk supports actually dropped after Mr. Nixon's action—from \$214 million in fiscal 1971 to \$174 million in 1972.

The milk producers contributed \$427,000 to the Nixon campaign. It was a fat sum. But the milk producers were buttering up everyone. In the last nine months of 1972, the milk producers gave away \$1.5 million in political contributions, most of the sum to Democrats.

The milk deal, in brief, strikes me thus far as something less than a hot story. Members of the House Judiciary Committee apparently feel the same way. My thought is to cool it.