

Congressional Panic Over Kissinger

Things got a bit hectic in World's Greatest Deliberative Body the other day. Senators tumbled over each other, spraining ankles and straining ligaments in their rush to endorse a resolution declaring that Henry Kissinger's "integrity and veracity are above reproach."

Never let it be said that our government is full of Hamlets who allow the native hue of their resolutions to be sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

Why, even the Secretary of Commerce, a gentleman named Fred Dent, rather grandly announced that he has "confidence" in Mr. Kissinger's integrity. You ask: "What does the Secretary of Commerce know about the complicated issues involved in the current controversy?" Don't ask.

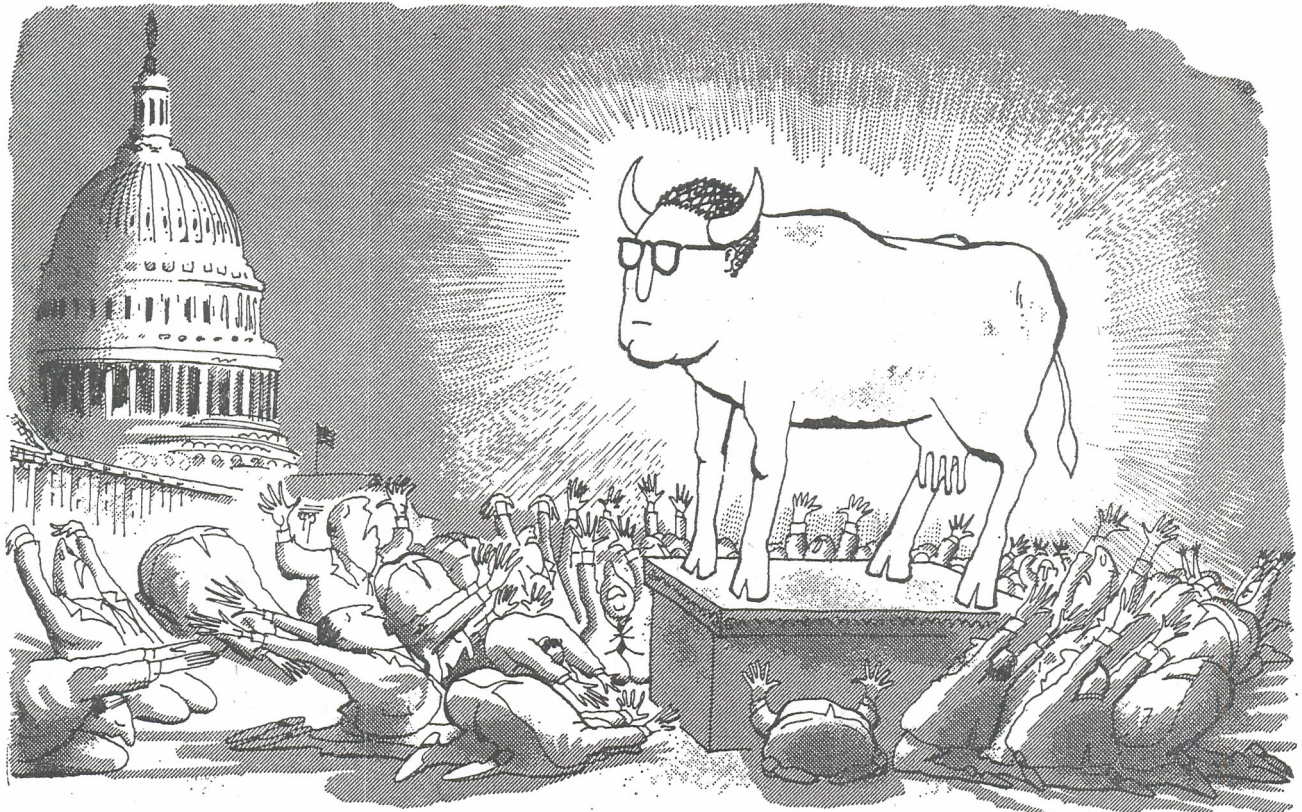
Ask instead about the significance of the remarkable government-wide reflex to rally 'round Mr. Kissinger.

This reflex involves more than a proper respect for Mr. Kissinger's exemplary patriotism and momentous achievements. It also involves palpable panic, especially in Congress.

Until now the spoor of the Watergate beast has led directly toward Mr. Nixon and those unpleasant friends of his—Messrs. Haldeman, Ehrlichman, Colson, Mitchell, et al. But now there is evidence that the most admired man in America, Mr. Kissinger, has done some dishonorable things, like misleading a Senate committee about his role in a secret and dishonorable wiretapping program.

Until now some people actually have enjoyed Watergate. But now they are faced with the possibility that there may be some evidence damaging to Mr. Kissinger, and suddenly Watergate just isn't fun anymore.

Unfortunately, the charges against Mr. Kissinger are numerous and specific. They cannot be blown away by a Senate "resolution." Too many people—some identified, some identifiable—



By Auth for the Philadelphia Inquirer

dispute Mr. Kissinger's sworn testimony that he did not initiate, and was a reluctant participant in, the wiretapping of his aides.

As is the case with us all, fatigue magnifies Mr. Kissinger's flaws, and even when he is in the pink he does not suffer criticism gladly. He is not used to hearing unpleasant questions. Sycophants on his staff and in the press revolve around him like satellites around a sun.

In Salzburg, at his version of Mr. Nixon's 1962 "last press conference," Mr. Kissinger resembled a duke addressing very minor barons as he decreed to the Senate: Affirm my veracity, or I will take my bat and ball and structure of peace and leave town.

His message was not original: *Après moi le deluge*. The senators touched their forelocks and scrambled to sign an affirming resolution.

Actually, were Congress to follow the evidence about Mr. Kissinger's veracity wherever it leads, crops would still grow and songs would still be written. But the Senate would rather declare Mr. Kissinger "above reproach" before getting bogged down in evidence.

So we are probably in for another despiriting episode of unresolved accusations and suspicions. Just for the record, and before confusion becomes total, let us be clear about what the issue is.

Mr. Kissinger and Special Prosecu-

tor Leon Jaworski think the wiretapping was legal. Perhaps it was. But pending court challenge will decide that. Anyway, the legality of the wiretapping is not the issue.

Mr. Kissinger says that much of the information that is embarrassing and infuriating him is coming from leaks. That is true, but not the issue.

The issue is: Was Mr. Kissinger so ashamed of his role in the wiretapping that he—as we say in Washington these days—"did fail and refuse to answer accurately and fully" questions asked at his Senate confirmation hearings?

The words quoted are those of the charge to which former Attorney General Richard Kleindienst pleaded guilty.