

'Nix on Nixon? Nah! Nix the U.N., Porn...'

By Tom Donnelly

Watergate has produced, among other things we didn't strictly need, a strange new variety of American citizen: the permissive reactionary. The term was coined, more or less inadvertently, by a friend of mine who observed that his Aunt Mildred, as strait-laced and rock-ribbed a woman as ever stood four-square on her own little acreage in the state of Maine, was taking an amazingly permissive view of corruption in the White House.

My friend said he never expected anyone like his Aunt Mildred to take the position that even if Nixon has done the unsavory things he's accused of he shouldn't be in any way penalized or called to account. Aunt Mildred doesn't put it quite this baldly, but in effect she is saying that no President can run a country full of crooks, pinko labor leaders, pornographers and Democrats unless he is prepared to fight fire with fire: that is, behave in unscrupulous and even illegal ways if the situation warrants.

Aunt Mildred feels you can't judge the conduct of a President by the same standards you would apply to the neighborhood druggist. You expect the druggist to give you full value for your dollar and if he doesn't, throw the bum in jail. But you can't nit-pick at a President, you have to remember the awful burdens of his job. The crooks and pornographers are living it up, aren't they? Why begrudge the First Family a few vacation houses, at San Clemente and wherever? Aunt Mildred's response to reports of the President's wheeling, dealing, conniving and stonewalling is to wear a "Support Our President" button with every change of custome.

Aunt Mildred, now so relaxed about the thought of high crimes in high places, was an honest-as-the-day-is-long type who wouldn't cheat a living soul out of so much as one penny, my friend said.

I was at once reminded of a woman of similar character, an ostentatiously genteel neighbor who once rebuked me for foul language when I tripped on a crack in the sidewalk just outside her house and, feeling her eye upon me, forced myself to say a mere "Dad blast it!" Mrs. Vesey showed herself to be mortally offended. Knowing her to be an ardent Nixonian, when everybody started talking about the tapes and those deleted expletives I said wasn't it a shame about Mr. Nixon's language.

Mrs. Vesey, cool as a cucumber popsickle, said it was only natural that men should do a little cussing when they got together to decide the fate of the nation. "It isn't easy," she said profoundly, "to run the most important country in the world."

Permissive reactionaries! They are everywhere! According to the polls, President Nixon has a hard-core following consisting of one-fourth to one-third of the electorate: these folks still revere him, even after two years of Watergate. Now not all of these Nixonians are permissive reactionaries, but it's plain to see that hordes of 'em are. For instance, clerics who ascend the pulpit and preach that those presidential expletives are a ginger-peachy form of therapy, a kind of emotional drainage that is really essential to keep the President buoyant and rosy-cheeked and on his political and metaphysical toes.

From coast to coast, Sunday-go-to-meeting-type citizens are smiling, ever so tolerantly, at all that blue language

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in the White House. Could these be the same folks who once applauded Mr. Nixon for deploring the salty speech of Harry Truman?

Father John McLaughlin, Jesuit priest and deputy special assistant to the President, has said the transcripts show that Mr. Nixon "was thirsting to find the truth" and has suggested that convicted Watergate conspirator E. Howard Hunt may have had "a legitimate moral right" to that hush money he purportedly received because, after all, Hunt had a family to support. It's hard to tell whether McLaughlin is a simple permissive reactionary, or just another hard-working comic trying to get on in the world.

Public opinion polls record the voice of the permissive reactionary. These aren't the folks who say Nixon didn't do a single blessed thing wrong, that he's just a victim of a lying and vengeful press. They say "Nixon stopped those campus riots" and "he slowed down school busing" and "he sets such a lovely exam-

ple with those prayer breakfasts." Priests, ministers, rabbis, garden club presidents, civic leaders—you find permissive reactionaries in every walk of life. That is, when they aren't indoors writing fiercely pro-Nixon letters to the editor.

In quick neighborhood survey I found six people I'd classify as permissive reactionaries: people who, emotionally and politically committed to Nixon, are condoning or explaining away maneuvers that a year or two ago they would have heartily deplored, even if those maneuvers had been committed by a conservative. Watergate has had an unhinging effect. I also heard about a man I can't classify. A woman told me that her brother says he hasn't spent 10 minutes reading about "the Watergate circus"; he doesn't have to read up on it, because he knows Watergate is a plot to make the government fall and it's being masterminded by a committee of five which has as a member David Rockefeller. This fellow is a John Bircher, but whether he's parroting the John Birch line or indulging in a wild solo flight of his own I couldn't say.