

Gains of Watergate

Positive and Hopeful Results Found As the Transition Is Made Smoothly

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 9.—Watergate has now joined Teapot Dome, Credit Mobilier and the Whisky Ring in the lexicon of political infamy. Yet, in millions of minds it also symbolizes the finest hour of American democracy. A President has been deposed,

but the Republic endures. Its institutions have survived, and some are saying they have been strengthened as well. Even the Presidency, which Richard M. Nixon professed to be so anxious to protect, shows no signs of debility. The man in the White House is as powerful today as he was yesterday, although his name has changed from Nixon to Ford.

He is just as powerful, although, as the new President said today, he is "acutely aware" that he was not elected by the votes of the people, whereas his predecessor had the largest popular majority in history.

Under the United States

Constitution, removal of the President requires drastic surgery, not just a shift in the political balance, as it does in the parliamentary democracies.

However, the surgery performed on the American Government this week, while agonizing and painful, has done a minimum of visible damage to the body politic.

Mr. Nixon himself has said that one way to judge a country is to see how it effects a transfer of power. Today's transfer was effected without missing a heartbeat.

"Our Constitution works," President Ford proclaimed, after taking the oath of office. "Here the people rule."

"All in all," William P.

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Rogers, former Secretary of State, said on CBS television, "I think the nation will come back stronger than it was in the past."

He and many others apparently see the results of Watergate as positive and hopeful.

First of all, a divisive force — namely, Mr. Nixon himself, plus his identification with Watergate — has been removed from American political life.

Mr. Nixon was, from the be-

ginning, a paradox — a man who could win elections but could not entirely win the trust and affection of the people. The do not call him "Tricky Dick" any more — that would demean the Presidency — but they have not forgotten.

Mr. Nixon said, when campaigning for the Presidency, that he would bring us together again. What he actually brought together, a friend of his said today, was a large political faction; they called it "the new majority."

It was powerful at the polls, but it could not save the President in Congress.

Sparks From Watergate

Watergate served to rouse Congress and revive its prestige, curb the imperial tendencies of the Presidency and rectify the balance between Capitol and White House.

One only has to recall a conversation in January, 1973, with John D. Ehrlichman, President Nixon's chief domestic adviser. He described Congress as a lazy bunch and said that if the legislators were unable to do their job the President would have to do it for them.

That was when the White House was "impounding" funds voted by Congress and simply refusing to carry out the will and intent of Congressional legislation.

Within six months, the President and Mr. Ehrlichman were under investigation by that same Congress.

Watching the workings of the Senate Watergate committee last summer and the House Judiciary Committee this summer, the people could see that men and women who had been depicted as bumbling incompetents were, in fact, serious citizens doing their constitutional duty in a conscientious way.

"I was thrilled," said a young woman who had never seen her Representatives at work before, and millions echoed her.

TV Provides Lesson

One of the lessons of Watergate might be that letting the people in on the deliberations of government, by means of television, is a good idea after all, and certainly not a dangerous one. There was no buffoonery and very little grandstanding on TV this summer or last. Instead of encouraging nonsense, television seemed to evoke dignity.

Political morality was clearly improved by Watergate — at least for the time being.

Half of those who went to prison seemed to go with a prayer on their lips. All politicians, guilty and not guilty, had to be aware of closer public scrutiny. They were much readier to disclose their personal finances, and may of them, without waiting for reform legislation, voluntarily limited contributions to their election campaigns; no more than \$100 from any one contributor was a common rule.

Bills to limit and control campaign contributions have passed both houses of Congress, but the two measures have to be reconciled before final enactment.

There is some cynicism, as usual, about the ultimate willingness of politicians to limit their own spending, but it seems safe to predict that there will not soon be another \$62-million campaign fund, such as Mr. Nixon's, and one so wantonly and improperly spent.

Reassertion of Liberties

Aside from limitations on campaign spending, the Senate Watergate committee has made 35 proposals to prevent a recurrence on the scandals that started with Watergate.

One of those scandals was the break-in at the Democratic National Committee in the Watergate office building, there had been questionable transgressions on the rights of citizens.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation had tapped the telephones of 17 government officials and newsmen suspected of leaking official information. A special White House unit for the investigation of leaks, called

"the plumbers," had committed at least two burglaries.

With Watergate, the liberties of the people were reasserted and the suspected threat to them was exposed.

Both the F.B.I. and the Central Intelligence Agency were called to account. Both suffered a loss of face and of reputation. They were subdued in the wake of Watergate, very unlike what they were in the days of J. Edgar Hoover and Allen Dulles.

The rule of law and the supremacy of the judiciary in interpreting the Constitution were reasserted by an 8 to 0 vote of the Supreme Court, including three Justices appointed by President Nixon.

Ruling that the President had to turn over evidence wanted from him in a criminal case, the Court reaffirmed "that it is 'emphatically the province and the duty' of this Court 'to say what the law is.'"

At the same time, the Court affirmed that the President had a general right to confidentiality in his communications and gave a new and clearer definition of that right.

Not only was the system of checks and balances among the three branches of government brought into play by Watergate, but also those auxiliaries of government, the political parties and the cabinet system, were somewhat restored to favor.

In the hearings on his appointment as Vice President, Gerald L. Ford said nine months ago, "Never again must Americans allow an arrogant elite guard of political adolescents like CREEP to bypass the regular Republican organization." His reference was to the Committee for the Re-Election of the President, a White House operation run by the President's henchmen.

If Mr. Nixon had not isolated himself from the regular Republican politicians, from his Cabinet and from Congress, they might have told him — even if his conscience did not — what he was doing wrong. That is the theory of many of his partisans who are now sadder but wiser men.

Finally, the power of the press, the fourth estate, was demonstrated again.

Even Ronald L. Ziegler, President Nixon's press secretary, said last night in his last White House news briefing, "I think I take away from this job a deep sense of respect for the country's freedom of expression and the strength of a free press." That was an unexpected compliment from a man who spent five and a half years in a largely adversary relationship with the news media.

While the press took pride in its performance and drew new confidence from it, some of Mr. Nixon's perennial paranoia about the press seemed to communicate itself to the public.

Therein may lie one of the negative consequences of Watergate. Most of the negative aspects — the sense of evil, the self-doubt and uncertainty, the personal tragedies, the dead-weight on government actions and policies, the drag on the economy — were put aside today.

But one that may remain is the sense of grievance among those who truly and stubbornly admired Richard Nixon to the end. If they come to believe — and especially if he encourages them to believe — he was wrongfully hounded out of office, Watergate could continue to cause divisiveness in the nation.

Another happier prospect is that Watergate will eventually take its proportionate place among the successes and failures of the Nixon Presidency and will loom no larger in the nation's over-all history than Teapot Dome.