

How the Soviets Explained Watergate

For 26 months, the Soviet Union's news media all but ignored the Watergate affair. Occasionally, a Soviet newspaper published a curt report on some startling development in the scandal, but these were never comprehensible to an ordinary citizen who knew none of the background. Then last week the President resigned, and the Soviet propaganda machine had to give some explanation. Two senior commentators, Leonid Zamyatin, director general of the news agency Tass, and Valentin Zorin, a commentator for Moscow Television, went on television Saturday night to report on Mr. Nixon's resignation. What follows is the text of their explanation of Watergate, given by Mr. Zamyatin:

If we are to analyze the domestic political situation of the United States in connection with the Watergate affair, it is necessary to look at the wider context of the whole problem. I would like to underline the fact that the reason the problem arose was the defeat of the Democratic Party in the 1972 elections. Thus it was actually used as the main weapon in the interparty struggle. The whole case was pictured as a conflict between the executive branch in the United States in the person of the President and Congress, as the legislative branch of the United States. This is all the more so, because as a result of the 1972 elections the President was a Republican and Congress was Democratic, since not only in the House but also in the Senate the Democrats had a great majority.

This created a situation in which the President was in a very difficult position, especially when carrying out domestic legislation, because of his relations with Congress. It is my view that the whole emotional nature of this affair was to a large extent a continuation of this interparty election struggle, which began during 1972 with the decisive defeat of the Democrats.

The Democratic Party had to work out a new platform for the preparation of the midterm elections in November 1974 and for the 1974 elections.

It is known that in November 1974

the whole U.S. House of Representatives has to be elected, as well as a third of the Senate and some of the state governors.

I think that to blame everything on the interparty struggle in this Watergate affair would be somewhat one-sided, because other factors were also involved which developed inside the United States.

For instance there was the economic situation, which led to deepening the crisis. The economic situation is very

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complicated. During all these years it has been the sharp inflation, in particular, which the administration has been unable to tackle. And it is not possible to speak here just of mistakes or errors made by the administration. The whole development of the crisis and the course of inflation are a reflection of the logic of capitalist production.

The difficult and complicated economic situation created a certain basis for the dissatisfaction of Americans and a general feeling of dissatisfaction. It is characteristic that a recent public opinion poll showed that 80 per cent of Americans do not consider interparty strife in Washington as the most important problem, but rather economic problems, which affect every American. And this then created a certain basis.

To this was added a second factor, propaganda. I was recently in the United States with a Soviet parliamentary delegation, and we were able to observe well, if I may say so, the emotional atmosphere which was created around the President and around this

whole problem, an atmosphere which was created by the U.S. information media.

Public opinion was molded by radio and television to the detriment of the U.S. President. The alleged motive was the problems in domestic politics. This was the main subject of the whole campaign. I would like to mention here one other fact: In the history of the United States, never before had meetings of the House or of the Senate been carried live on television. . . . But in connection with the possible resignation of the President, a special resolution of the House was adopted which allowed live relays of the Judiciary Committee meetings, which discussed all these questions, in view of possible future impeachment. Also all U.S. television channels — and there are 12 such television channels — were permitted to carry live relays of the conclusions of this problem.

These facts clearly indicate what sort of emotional atmosphere they wanted to create in this affair by putting the entire problem before the U.S. public. In his resignation statement President Nixon underlined this aspect of the situation, especially the situation in Congress. I am going to quote his statement: "I have concluded that because of the Watergate matter I might not have the support of the Congress that I would consider necessary to back the very difficult decisions and carry out the duties of this office in the way the interests of the nation would require."