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The Nixon Trial OCT 1 1974

The Watergate trial, which begins today in the United States District Court in Washington, is both the continuation and the culmination of the long, circuitous pursuit of the truth in what former Attorney General John Mitchell, one of the defendants, so fittingly called "the White House horrors."

After the elaborate efforts to block access to the facts behind the worst political scandal in the nation's history, the trial will be taking place in an appropriately familiar setting. Judge John J. Sirica, who on Feb. 2, 1973, foiled the attempted cover-up by telling the original Watergate burglars that he was "not satisfied" that they had told the full story, now presides over his final attempt to delve, as he phrased it, "to the bottom of what happened in this case."

The wide-ranging charges against H. R. Haldeman, John D. Ehrlichman and Mr. Mitchell, the three major defendants, are in themselves a matter of grave concern. They involve allegations of outrageous abuse of power by men whose favors and enmities vitally affected national policies and personal fortunes. Their influence was such that it apparently enabled them, in effect, to suspend the laws and to deprive opponents of their constitutional protection.

It is difficult to imagine a trial involving charges of more serious violations of the people's rights. And yet over these procedures hovers an issue of even greater gravity. At the heart of the case remains inevitably the role played by the defendants' unindicted co-conspirator—Richard Nixon. As the former President's surrogates, the men in the dock cannot escape confronting the ultimate question of Mr. Nixon's own actions and commands.

Whether or not Mr. Nixon will eventually join the proceedings as a witness, the defendants know that the jury will hear the recordings of their master's voice. This fact alone turns this historic trial into a continuation of those deliberations by the United States Supreme Court which on July 24 ended with an 8-to-0 ruling that Mr. Nixon's tapes be turned over to Judge Sirica to satisfy "the fundamental demands of due process of law in the fair administration of Justice."

Mr. Nixon's resignation to avoid virtually certain impeachment, followed by President Ford's premature pardon, threatened to withhold from the American people and from history the full truth about the White House horrors. It is thus, in large measure, left to this trial to end the cover-up of a dismal and dangerous past and thereby help repair the foundations of the Government of the United States and protect them from similar assaults in the future.