

itor

The President and the Lie

To the Editor:

President Ford said in his recent testimony before the House Judiciary subcommittee that, after he was informed by Alexander Haig that soon-to-be-released tapes would establish President Nixon's guilt in the Watergate cover-up, he had to lie to the American public and continue to profess that he believed in Nixon's innocence because any change from his previous statements on this subject would look as if he were trying to usurp the Presidency.

This confession confirms what was so often said during his Vice-Presidential tenure: that he should not be saying anything one way or another about Mr. Nixon's part in Watergate. Instead, ignoring the mounting evidence of Presidential complicity, he foolishly became a stooge for Nixon and his cronies in their campaign to obstruct justice. As a consequence, President Ford was forced to start his new, "open" Administration by admitting he lied to the people on a fundamental issue. Trust in his word has been irreparably damaged. By the time a man becomes Vice President, he should be wise enough to know when to keep his mouth shut.

President Ford also seems naive when he protests that no deal was made over the pardon when Haig discussed various options available to Nixon if he resigned. No one seriously thought that Vice President Ford told Haig, "If Nixon makes me President, I will make sure he doesn't go to jail." Clearly, Haig was launching a trial balloon with the Vice President to get his reaction. This is a standard bureaucratic technique used so often by the Nixon Administration.

Haig probably went back to Nixon and reported that he had broached the subject of pardon with Mr. Ford, who had not reacted against the idea. They therefore probably estimated that the chances were good that a pardon could be arranged, particularly if Haig was still around to smooth the way. Obviously, they guessed correctly. Nixon and Haig were much too slick a combination for "Mr. Clean," Jerry Ford.

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