

Watergate and the Ford Campaign

Howard H. Callaway, President Ford's campaign manager, showed himself to reporters the other day and instantly demonstrated that he has at least one major talent. He can whistle in the dark.

"Anyone who thinks they can taint Gerald Ford with the Watergate scandal," he told reporters, "will find that it won't wash." He went on to say that Richard Nixon would play no role in the Ford campaign.

They are brave words. But Callaway must know that any Democratic candidate who will not remind the American people that Gerald Ford granted a full and complete pardon to Richard Nixon would be derelict in his duty. He must also know that there are some other Watergate matters likely to bubble up between now and election time and which might be embarrassing to the man whom Nixon chose as his Vice President.

Who caused the 18½-minute gap on the tape? Who prepared those fake transcripts which Mr. Nixon put out with the assurance that they told the full story, "the rough as well as the smooth"? Was it anyone still on the White House staff? Is it possible that Gen. Alexander Haig, who was Gerald Ford's choice for Commander-In-Chief

of NATO, did not know that those tapes had been edited?

And what about Morton Halperin's suit against Henry Kissinger? By next winter, the courts will have decided whether Kissinger acted legally when he put a wiretap on his colleague in the National Security Council.

Halperin says he might not have brought that suit if the wiretap had been cancelled when he left Kissinger's staff. But the tap continued, and continued for 17 months, during much of which time Halperin was working for Sen. Edmund Muskie.

Why did the taps continue? If Kissinger authorized them, and the court so holds, will it be possible for Callaway to keep that issue out of the campaign?

There's also the matter of Bebe Rebozo and the \$100,000 he got from Howard Hughes and returned three years later. Not that Rebozo is a Gerald Ford crony, but Callaway is really asking a lot when he asks us to regard Gerald Ford as though Gerald Ford had never had anything to do with Richard Nixon. He is also asking a lot when he asks us to regard the Republican Party as totally divorced from the man it presented to the voters for its national ticket in five of the last six elections.

The Democratic candidate, whoever he may be, might also suggest that Gerald Ford play us the tapes of his conversations with Richard Nixon. Those tapes have never been subpoenaed because the relations between the two men were never in question until the pardon.

But when Mr. Ford pardoned Nixon, a lot of people were reminded that the White House tapes show Nixon suggesting Mr. Ford as the man to stop Rep. Wright Patman's (D-Texas) early move to investigate the Watergate break-in. Was Mr. Ford informed of the role Nixon wanted him to play? Was he ever told why the White House didn't want an investigation? One way to silence any lingering suspicions of a Nixon-Ford deal would be to make public the tapes of Nixon-Ford conversations.

In short, the idea that the next presidential campaign can be conducted without any reference to Watergate is ridiculous. Watergate is the reason Gerald Ford is President of the United States. Does Callaway really believe the voters won't remember that? Or that the Democratic candidate will not remind them?