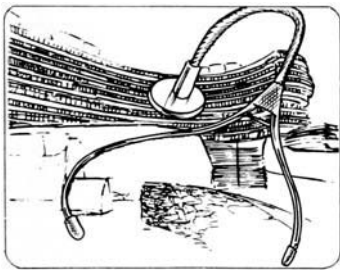


States of the Union

A GLOSSARY OF 'WATARGOT'

BY RICHARD J. MARGOLIS



MANY Americans have complained that they do not understand the Watergate affair. "Too complicated," says an Omaha retailer. "Makes me dizzy," whimpers a homemaker from Little Rock. It's a shame. The bewildered citizen is deprived of pleasures he might have deposited in his memory bank against a leaner, less chicaning era.

Let me make one thing perfectly clear: Watergate is not hard to understand. It is simply a matter of getting the semantics straight. Once you have grasped the basic vocabulary—the "watargot," if you will—everything else falls into place. Accordingly, and as a public service, I have compiled a simple Watergate glossary guaranteed to bring in-

stant understanding. Study this easy-to-read guide 10 minutes every night before going to sleep. Two insights per night or your money back.

Arrogant. An adjective commonly used by persons desperate to describe White House behavior vis-à-vis the Congress, the judicial system, the electorate, and the *Washington Post*. It should be enunciated with a rising inflection, as in "They're so arrogant!" People who choose this word continually grope for a better one. Some alternatives that come to mind include: self-righteous, insolent, pompous, sanctimonious, high-handed, holier-than-thou, canting, tartuffian (not recommended), unctuous, and mealy-mouthed. "Pious fraud" is effective if not overdone. "It is with a pious fraud as with a bad action," observed Thomas Paine, "it begets a calamitous necessity of going on." Paine did not specifically cite the Watergate coverup.

Corruption. In free-enterprise democracies, a bedrock of the human condition. Also, a nagging weakness best kept to oneself. Occasionally this private, local foible becomes a public, national affair,

e.g., *Crédit Mobilier*, Teapot Dome, Watergate. Then the President of the United States confesses he has been the last to hear about it. When Warren Gamaliel Harding learned that his Veterans Bureau director, Charles Forbes, had been shamelessly robbing the Federal treasury, he summoned the culprit to the White House and shook him, according to a witness, "as a dog would a rat." Poor Forbes bolted out and booked passage on the first ship to Europe.

When corruption is discovered, the embarrassed political leaders generally point an accusing finger at the opposition. "There are crooks in every community and in every party," thundered Harding's former secretary of state, Charles Evans Hughes, as he surveyed the wreckage of Teapot Dome. ". . . Let wrongs be exposed and punished, but let not partisan Pecksniffs affect 'a holier than thou' attitude. . . . Guilt is personal and corruption knows no party." Richard Nixon, in his televised confession last month, said much the same thing. He referred darkly to "campaign excesses" on both sides. "Two wrongs," he intoned, displaying an

uncanny felicity of speech, "do not make a right."

Democracy. "A charming form of government, full of variety and disorder" (Plato). "Most commonly corrupted by the insolence of demagogues" (Aristotle). See *arrogant*, above.

Impeach, impeachment, unimpeachable. The words have different meanings for different persons on different occasions. For example, in Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*, Mrs. Malaprop makes this peculiar announcement: "I own the soft impeachment." She apparently means to confess it was she who wrote the falsely signed love letters to Sir Lucius O'Trigger. "I had a modest hand in the mischief," she might say today. Nixon said something similar April 30 when he accepted the responsibility for Watergate but not the blame.

In the same speech the President called Elliot Richardson "a man of unimpeachable integrity," by which he meant that under no circumstances should Richardson be impeached. The next day Congressman John E. Moss of Pennsylvania urged House Democratic leaders to open a formal inquiry into the possible impeachment of Nixon. The sequence was clearly coincidental.

"Impeach" comes from the Latin, *impedicare*, meaning to tangle one's feet, or put in fetters. Of all our Presidents only the bootless Andrew Johnson was ever thus entangled, and most historians agree it was a frameup. "The set of 11 articles of impeachment which the House framed [in 1868]," notes historian John M. Blum, "was a rambling, tautological, confused indictment. . . ." It "represented only a venomous effort of the Radicals to depose a President who hated and opposed them."

In impeachment proceedings, the House indicts and the Senate, by a two-thirds majority, can convict. The vote on Johnson was 35-19, one short of dismissal. Eight years after the Johnson affair, the House

again indulged in impeachment dreams. Its target this time was a member of the Grant Administration, Secretary of War William W. Belknap, who had accepted annual bribes from traders at Indian posts in the West. Belknap escaped conviction when certain Senators argued that their chamber lacked jurisdiction in the case.

When making predictions about impeachment, however, one should not rely on history. As Mrs. Malaprop remarked, "We will not anticipate the past!"

Investigations. An awkward means of getting at some awkward truths. "Our investigations," Will Rogers observed, "have always contributed more to our amusement than they have to our knowledge."

Preventive detention. A modern crime-fighting technique, tirelessly promoted by the present Administration, that could have saved us from the Watergate mess. If we had known how to decode former Attorney General John N. Mitchell's many tributes to wiretapping, we might have intervened in time. On August 13, 1969, in a speech to the American Bar Association, Mitchell declared, "Most recognized law enforcement experts have repeatedly stated that wiretapping is our most useful tool in obtaining information about this organized criminal syndicate." In his view, we now know, "most recognized law enforcement experts" meant the Republican party, while "this organized criminal syndicate" was shorthand for the Democrats.

Water gate. A gate used to control the flow of a body of water; anything that restrains a flood or outpouring. The New York *Times* opened page of April 28 featured the following passage from Nehemiah: "And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate. . . . And Ezra the priest brought the law before the con-

gregation both of men and women. . . ." Many people thought it clever of the *Times* to have found that Biblical bit of relevance. Unfortunately, the editors forgot to mention that their memories were jogged by John Knox Jessup, the erudite CBS commentator, who had cited the same passage four days earlier.

Jessup, in turn, was indebted to Mrs. John Maurice Clark, a lady from Westport, Connecticut, and an aunt of Mrs. Jessup. Recently I telephoned Mrs. Clark and asked her how a water gate had slipped into the Bible. She explained:

"It was just after the Babylonian captivity; Cyrus—that benevolent Persian monarch—had told Nehemiah he could lead his people back to Palestine. Well, when they reached Jerusalem, things were in a bad state. The wall had to be rebuilt and so did the water system. Each tribe was assigned work on a different section of the wall. One part was near the Pool of Siloam, and that's where they built the water gate, to allow the water to flow into the city. As it happened, the pool was located near the huge square in front of the Temple. So all the people gathered at the water gate to hear Ezra read the Laws of Moses. I think it's pertinent, don't you?"

Watergate. A sleek hotel, apartment and office complex eight blocks from the White House. Room rates range from \$30-\$140 a day (for the Presidential Suite). I am indebted to Mary Lou Tardio, a consultant to the hotel, for the following advice:

"Do please avoid the clichés and incorrect data that have appeared . . . during the past five years, i.e., that Watergate is a 'Republican stronghold.' I know there are as many (if not more) Democrats as Republicans living here. . . ."

Miss Tardio says, "The complex offers a number of advantages for the person living alone." The feature she lists first: "Excellent security."