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## Timor-Leste bugging was our Watergate — except in this version, Nixon wins

Neither Labor nor News Corp are interested in one of the greatest scandals and cover-ups of recent Australian history, the bugging of Timor-Leste.

By [Bernard Keane](#), Politics Editor



*Nicholas Coudery QC, Bernard Collaery and Senator Nick Xenophon*

Imagine Watergate if the Democrats, and many Republicans, had never been interested in pursuing it. And if the American media - not just *The Washington Post*, but the many other newspapers that began putting more and more resources into the story despite Nixon's cover-up - hadn't bothered. Well, there wouldn't be any Watergate. Nixon would have served out his full two terms and retired as the elder statesman of post-war politics. The break-in at the Democrat headquarters on June 17, 1972, would be a piece of political trivia about one of the worst Democratic campaigns in history, and nothing more.

The Howard government's bugging of the Timor-Leste cabinet in 2004 is the Watergate of Australian politics, a crime committed by a pack of bullies who believed themselves above the law, not against a rival political organisation that was capable of fighting back through the political system, but a struggling, deeply impoverished neighbour. A crime that has been covered up ever since through a

combination of lies, refusals to discuss the issue, harassment and intimidation and, now, a vexatious political prosecution of Witness K and Bernard Collaery. Only, in this version of Watergate, the political opposition is entirely uninterested in either the crime or the cover-up, and refuses to do anything about either. Bob Carr and Mark Dreyfus lied about the issue in 2013, perpetuating the cover-up. You can watch Tanya Plibersek twisting and turning to avoid commenting in 2016. "Don't you want to know? Do you want to know what the answer to this?" Tony Jones asked Plibersek about it. Apparently not.

Some parts of the media have been better: Fairfax, the ABC and *The Guardian* have all carried a number of articles of reportage, comment and analysis of the prosecution of K and Collaery in the last week, particularly concerning a number of figures who have criticised the prosecution. The ABC, of course, prominently covered the issue in 2013 and 2014, and its journalists and producers are named in the prosecution documents as being the people Collaery communicated information to. But one noticeable absentee from coverage of the prosecution is News Corp outlets. News.com.au and the News Corp tabloids have had no coverage of the prosecution at all; The Australian had one article covering the prosecution, and a brief mention in "Strewth". Otherwise, the issue has received no coverage whatsoever from the Murdoch press.

Which, given it was The Australian's yarn, given Leo Shanahan broke the story on May 29, 2013, is rather peculiar. Normally the Oz and its tabloid cousins are eager to remind us that they had the scoop, and that everyone else in the media is just playing catch-up. Why the studied silence over K and Collaery? Oh, that's right, the government decided to omit News Corp from the prosecution documents. Only ABC staff will have to give evidence, and perhaps have their conversations with Collaery played in court. Not Shanahan. And one News Corp commentator, Niki Savva, actually tried to justify the prosecution on *Insiders* last week.

Clearly the Turnbull government didn't want to risk News Corp firing up over the prosecution by including one of its journalists. It wants K and Collaery prosecuted in camera, as quietly as possible, with minimal coverage, to punish them for exposing both the crime and cover-up, and to signal to anyone else who might be in a position to embarrass them that they're next - only now the penalty is a decade in jail, (thank you George Brandis) not the two years Collaery and K face. So it's keeping News Corp onside, and so far News Corp is complying.

The cover-up continues right before our eyes.

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*What do you make of the media coverage of the prosecution of Witness K and Bernard Collaery?  
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