

Editorial

The people out on the brink with Nixon

In a very short time, this country will be faced with a decision of monumental importance: the fate of Richard M. Nixon as President of the United States. Along with Nixon the man, his philosophy of government will also be weighed in the balance of that decision.

Short of his resignation, Nixon most definitely will be facing a vote to impeach in the House of Representatives by late spring. At the moment, it is almost inconceivable that the House Judiciary Committee will report to their colleagues anything less than a demand for impeachment. In the House, impeachment requires only a simple majority. If Nixon's track record for obfuscating the facts continues, it is almost impossible to see how House fence-sitters like our own Rep. John Dellenback can vote with the President.

Once the impeachment proceeding moves to the Senate, the battle will be joined in force. Every trick in the bag, every innuendo and persuasion known to politics will be thrown at the Senators as they decide the crucial question. The general public, too, will be the subject of an intense information bombardment from two different sources. One message will say: Save our President, he does not deserve to be impeached. The other will say: Get rid of the man, he's failed the country.

The result will be mental civil war for the nation.

This civil war may very well be circumvented by Nixon's early retirement from public life, but it would be an easy answer for a tired nation. Of late, elements in Congress which are loyal to Nixon have declined by and large to continue their sometimes harsh criticism of him. At least one major figure, Sen. Barry Goldwater, has switched to a defensive posture, urging that Congress impeach the President or drop the subject. Until recently, Goldwater was seen as leading a group of loyalist Republicans to the White House to urge Nixon to resign. The chance now of such a scenario happening before actual impeachment by the House is about zero. After impeachment, and with the harrowing weeks of a Senate trial looming ahead, Nixon could very well call it quits and get out with as much grace as he can.

But if he does resign in the face of possible conviction, then he will almost assuredly receive the same cold treatment the nation has meted out to former Vice-President Spiro Agnew. And like Agnew, national public opinion will hold him guilty of many of the scandal charges. Yet, others will believe him innocent, hounded out of office by the media, leftists and possibly some vague communist conspiracy. But the historians will get it right,

and the name of Nixon will be a name of sorrow and shame for the children of America. The best a resigned President can expect is that some future historian a hundred years from now will write a sympathetic account of his fate.

Richard Nixon is no quitter. The man believes in himself, and as events over the past year have proved, so do many of his assistants. Nixon should hold on to his job at least until the Senate trial opens. His one clear hope—that friends and allies will stand by him no matter what—is tenuous. The entire House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate will be up for re-election in the fall. Although the President seems strong in the South and some of his supporters from other areas hold safe seats, the majority will face the judgment of their constituents. Nixon needs a minimum of 34 Senators on his side or he will be through. If a Senator votes the wrong way, he will be through with the voters.

How do the people vote? The opinion polls tell us that a hefty majority feel Nixon to be guilty of at least one of the charges. Almost in the same breath, however, a part of that majority does not feel Nixon should be found guilty. These people say that they are afraid impeachment will tear the country apart.

The current breakdown on the impeachment issue is about even, but the trend over the past few months has seen a steady rise in anti-Nixon sentiment. Nixon has tried to stem the tide of opinion against him and he has failed. Feelings against him can only rise in the months ahead, and every failing of the Administration on inflation, prices, shortages and the like will be Nixon's failings.

Once proceedings in the Senate begin and the heat is on, many people of moderate persuasion will be in anguish over what course to follow. Conviction by the Senate may be a painting black of Richard Nixon, but acquittal can just as easily be interpreted as a clean white sheet. Like his favorite sport of football, Nixon will be going into the game knowing that he can either win or lose—there is nothing else. And the game stats—a million history books in the hands of school kids—will tell the whole story to future generations. Nixon is enough of a realist to realize that his chances even now are not good, but he knows also that the game isn't over until the last play has run.

What can save him is the hard core of his support, the Silent Majority of yesterday, who remain so amazingly silent today. But soon the heat will be on and sides will have to be taken. If the question at hand concerned the great issue of ideology, of conservatism versus liberalism or radicalism, then perhaps

Nixon could count on the oil people and the bankers, the construction workers and the farmers, to support him en masse. Perhaps he could find comfort in the millions of people living simple lives in ten thousand small towns around the country. He could say to them, "Have I ever lied to you, have I ever misled or mistreated you?" But Nixon cannot ask his people those questions today, and if he did, he would surely receive the answers with tears in his eyes. His people—gas station owners in Oregon and corporate executives in New York—don't want to give answers to the President. Earlier, they were not anxious to hear of Watergate and the other scandals, now they dread the final confrontation. They fear the President's trial would be their trial, his indictment to be their indictment. They would much prefer a safe and conservative Jerry Ford in the Presidency. Why link oneself with a sinking ship? Why continue to argue in the fantasy land of Nixonian principle?

The best that can be gotten from the President's supporters is the call for a quick vote on impeachment in the hope that House members will feel rushed and unsure. Certainly such a maneuver, if done soon enough, might be successful. But the wheels of justice grind slowly, the cliché says, and any effort to speed up the proceedings will be matched by demands for a thorough job.

One all-purpose defense advanced by Nixon supporters is the allegation that there is a small body of professional haters out to get the President. This is true. In the almost thirty years of public life that Nixon has enjoyed, he has managed to acquire a growing army of haters, the kind of people who will tell you about Jerry Voorhes and Helen Gahagan Douglas. But the present conflict has not come about because of these people. It has come instead from a solid cross section of American thought and culture, from the editorial offices of every political persuasion, from the multi-colored spectrum of the Democratic party, from union leaders and corporate executives alike. The conflict exists simply because the truth has been denied, and where the truth is known, the confession and contrition lacking.

If Nixon would present an honest statement of his involvement, one that would make decent sense, then people could very well embrace him again. But these statements have not been forthcoming and the people are confused.

The brink of decision is fast approaching for the people and Congress. And out on that brink the buck cannot be passed—the fate of Richard Nixon must finally be made.

Letter

Criminal Nixon

If anyone has not yet written to Congressman Dellenback to urge the immediate impeachment of President Nixon I would strongly encourage them to do so immediately.

Again, just as it was with the many End-the-War amendments, it is clear that Congress does not have the moral courage

to do what is right. Only if hundreds of Congressional members are reached by millions of concerned citizens and told that Nixon must be impeached or that they will be defeated at the polls this November, will Nixon be expelled from office.

IT IS UNFORTUNATE that moves to impeach Nixon have not received more support from our governmental representatives. However, this must not stop honest citizens from demanding that criminal Nixon be brought to justice.

John T. Stewart
Senior, Political Science

