

After Such Public Service, Why Talk of Impeachment?

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The question before the Wranglers after dinner that evening was whether to impeach President Nixon. Our little circle of serious thinkers takes such responsibilities seriously. So the Wranglers, the dozen-odd that are still after 25 years meeting once a month to decide on the great issues, listened gravely as the essayist for the occasion, Dave Mazer, summarized the evidence thus far emerged from the Watergate hearings and particularized what the impeachment process is and what it isn't—then stopped.

A vote would have to be taken in due time, but meanwhile the Wranglers had their wrangling to do. One

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by one, in accordance with a tradition that guarantees each man the time he needs to state and defend his position, the 12 of us—it was in number a jury, at that—would persuade each other beyond the shadow of reasonable doubt, before midnight too.

A consensus developed. And to summarize:

Once more Mr. Nixon is performing for the nation a service no other American could do. He is dismantling the monarchical presidency.

Nobody else could have gotten us out of Vietnam on the terms this White House accepted—a Nixon defeated in 1968 would have organized and led a tumultuous resistance to the settlement a Nixon elected could declare peace with honor. Nobody else could have imposed wage and price

controls on the country in peacetime; it was necessary to have Mr. Nixon in the White House simply to preclude his leading an assault on it. Nobody else could have built these handsome and evidently sturdy bridges to godless Communism.

And who but Mr. Nixon could have conceived, much less carried out, the contraction of presidential power by so elegantly simple a device as inflating it until it burst?

The Wranglers are most of them liberals and hence wishful, and it had been supposed that they'd come to the meeting with "Impeach Nixon!" stickers on their car bumpers alongside "McGovern," "Save the Bay," and "Think Snow," but as one said his piece and yielded to the next man in the circle, notice was taken:

• That if the House were to vote a bill of impeachment this indictment would have to charge treason or a crime, and nothing of the sort has ever been attributed to Mr. Nixon.

• That if impeachment were moved and voted down, as it would have to be unless a majority of the Representatives have lost their mind and their sense of elemental fairness, the process would amount to vindication of the Nixon White House and all its paranoid works.

• That if the President were im-

peached and convicted by two-thirds vote in the Senate, we'd have as chief magistrate and commander in chief of the armed forces none other than...

But it seemed to some of the Wranglers unjust to enumerate reasons why the President should not—at this time,

to appropriate one of his wittier locutions—be impeached. They insisted he be credited with taking a presidency that had grown gross and swollen under Roosevelt, Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson, a presidency bloated beyond recognition, and reducing it to dogcatcher dimensions. Gene Francis the actor and radio feller took notes on the remarks of Gene Francis the onetime Freeholder:

• Mr. Nixon has contrived to guarantee the enactment of campaign finance controls that will put election-buyers in jail before the vote is cast.

• He has made the appeal to national security prima facie evidence of intent to disobey the law.

• He has exonerated the press and the media of all the charges ever brought against them by Agnew and the rest of the bullies, and has loyally vindicated Jefferson's dictum that if the American citizen had to choose between having a government and having a free press he should choose the latter.

• He has brought into power the people's lobbies—Ralph Nader's, John Gardner's, lately Carl Marburger's.

• He has set in motion some complicated visual aids enabling people at large to perceive that the doctrine of law and order can and should be applied to the wealthy and respectable as evenhandedly as it is against the poor and humble.

• As he has done again this month

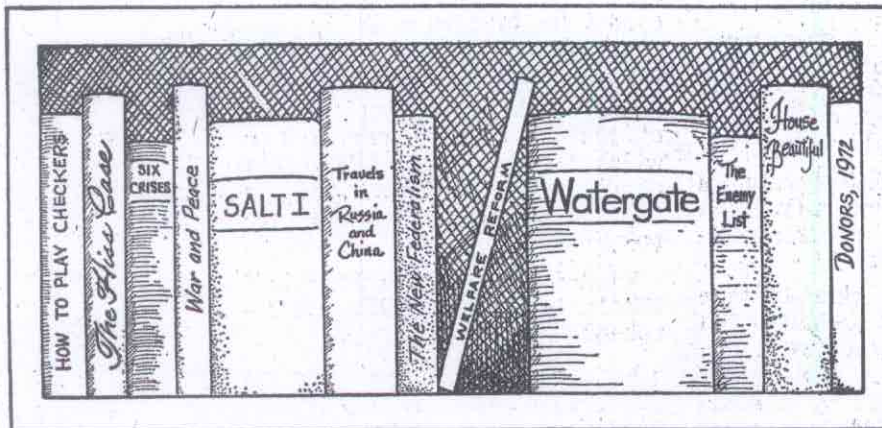
when he took Leonid Brezhnev in his arms, he has rendered extinct a form of Red-baiting he invented, the only President who could have gotten away with it.

• He has stripped away the mystique of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. He has brought the CIA from the level of the dread OGPU or KGB to the level of the dread Keystone cops.

• The President has silenced, as no Congress or judicial system could have done, that blow-hard Clay Whitehead's effort to frighten the electronic media into subservience to a brainless tyranny.

• Out of a Republican party that he had hammered into crumbling ruins he has summoned the cadres of a new leadership. People will remember who it was that first grabbed their nose and said this stench was intolerable. The Democrats haven't yet noticed the maggots. Republican senators and governors blew the whistle. They have Richard I to thank for the opportunity.

In the end the Wranglers took a vote and decided unanimously not to impeach Mr. Nixon but to reconvene in September and consider the proposition in the light of such facts as develop meanwhile. That leaves Richard Kleindienst the only known advocate of impeaching the President if you don't like what he's doing.



By David Gunderson