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Perfectly Clear-isms

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People not versed in the intricacies of media language often have trouble interpreting media events. As a service to this unsophisticated public, I will try to answer some of the questions growing out of last week's biggest media event—the presidential press conference.

Q. I got confused when the President was explaining why he does not expect to be impeached. Would you try to clear it up for me?

A. This is precisely the kind of thing that nonmedia people have difficulty with. It is simply a matter of understanding the Constitution and the appropriate presidential doctrines.

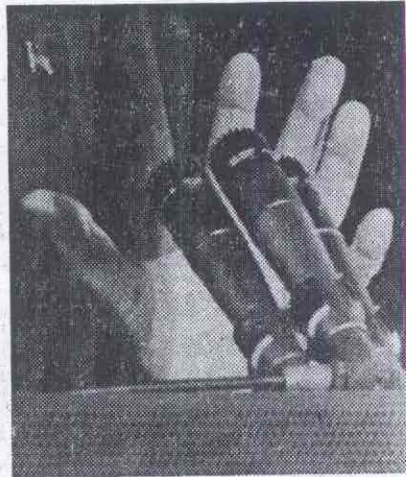
The President cannot be indicted for a criminal offense unless he is first impeached, convicted and removed from office. He may not be impeached except for criminal offenses. He cannot be required to provide evidence of possible criminal offenses in which he may be involved because of the doctrines of separation of powers and confidentiality.

Thus, there is no way to determine whether he has committed criminal offenses, or impeachable ones, which is the same thing, and therefore he cannot be impeached.

Q. What does Mr. Nixon mean when he speaks of protecting the "office of the presidency," as when he says that he will cooperate with the Senate Judiciary Committee "in any way consistent with my constitutional responsibility to defend the office of the presidency . . ."

A. Well, clearly he is not talking about defending an empty room. The "office of the presidency" is an operative expression only when there is a presidency in it. And as everybody knows, there is only one presidency.

The reason for your confusion is Mr. Nixon's lawyerly care in pointing out that he is not merely defending himself, which is every American's right; he is defending the presidency, which



is the President's solemn duty. Now if the presidency, the President and Richard Nixon turn out to be the same person, well, that's the way it was with Lyndon Johnson, Abraham Lincoln and, possibly, Martin Van Buren as well.

Q. My telephone rang just as the President was about to say whether he thought he had paid his fair share of taxes. Did he?

A. Hubert Humphrey's another one, and so is John Kenneth Galbraith.

Q. I'm not clear on the question of price roll-backs and the length of gasoline lines. Would you explain it—slowly?

A. This one is very difficult to explain to laymen who don't understand the difference between the Keynesian and the Simonize approaches to supply and demand. To oversimplify, you can't roll back gasoline prices because that would reduce profits and make the oil industry stop working to increase supplies. So what you do is you let prices rise to the point that they can make more profits without increasing supplies.

No, strike that. If you reduce prices you attract more customers and make the lines longer, and if the lines are longer the oil industry will have no incentive to find new oil because that would make the lines longer than ever. So you raise prices to shorten lines which will make the oil industry bring in more oil so they can lure people back to the lines . . . I told you it's hard to explain.

Q. I understood the President to say that there will be no recession. How can he be so sure?

A. One of the earmarks of a genuine recession is significant unemployment, and since the President of the United States, the most significant person in the country, still has his job, obviously there can be no recession, except, of course, for indictable offenses.

Q. No direct mention was made of it, but I'm wondering: If the President is successful in his efforts to increase energy production—which is to say if he can get the oil industry to take more oil and gas out of the ground—won't that leave some awfully big cavities down there? I mean, what will happen to the ground that used to be supported by the oil?

A. That's a good question.

Q. Does the President intend to go abroad this year?

A. Only for indictable offenses.