

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Post 8/12/74 *Reaction to Mr. Nixon's Resignation*

Throughout the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment debate, one principle was repeatedly espoused by the President's friends and foes alike: "No man, be he pauper or President, is above the law." Members disagreed about what the law was, or whether the evidence of violation was sufficiently compelling. But the principle of presidential accountability to law evoked near-unanimous assent within the Committee — as one may hope it does among the American people.

How should that principle be applied now that Mr. Nixon has resigned? Remember, had Mr. Nixon not been President, he would have been indicted and would be standing trial next month for conspiracy and obstruction of justice in the Watergate coverup. Had he not been President, he would have been compelled to testify under oath as to his knowledge of the Watergate affair; instead, he was able to falsify the matter to the nation repeatedly without fear of prosecution for perjury. Today, there still is evidence on which a grand jury might indict

him in connection with abuse and attempted abuse of the IRS, the CIA and the FBI. His possible criminal responsibility in connection with the underpayment of his federal income taxes is still under investigation. How should the law be applied to him in the wake of his resignation?

It seems to me that now, just after the event, is not the time to answer that question. With the weight of Watergate lifted from our shoulders, there will surely be a period of national euphoria. There will be and should be a universal determination to heal the wounds of the past two years, to recapture our national dignity and regain confidence in our government, and to attack the pressing economic and social problems which beset our country. In this atmosphere it will be hard to think dispassionately about how and whether to apply the law to ex-President Nixon, and about the long-range consequences of our decision.

And yet the decision is of utmost importance. If Mr. Nixon receives am-

nesty or immunity, either by action of Congress or through inaction by the Special Prosecutor or the Justice Department, he will now retire to private life, with a presidential pension of \$60,000 per year, free office space and an annual staff allowance of \$96,000. Because he was President, he will enjoy lifetime financial security and escape prosecution for crimes committed in office, although the Constitution affords him no such immunity. What effect may this have on future Presidents who might be tempted to order IRS audits or FBI investigations of political opponents, to tap the phones of newsmen and dissenters, to underpay their taxes using back dated documents, and to countenance and cover up criminal misconduct by members of the White House staff?

The question is, I think, very difficult, and that is why it should not be answered in the emotional aftermath of Mr. Nixon's resignation.

ROGER S. KUHN,

Professor of Law, The National Law Center
George Washington University
Washington.

Help Public Officials

The President has resigned and now the United States must begin to rebuild after one of the biggest political scandals in our history.

There are many lessons to be learned at this time. We must be more aware of how our government works and who is running it. We should discard this feeling of apathy which is so very evident in our attitudes and take an active interest in what is said to be the most important paper in our history—the United States Constitution. But, most of all, we should remember that those men and women who hold public office are human beings. They are capable of making mistakes and bad judgments. We should never allow ourselves to think of them as mere objects without feelings or emotions. We should look upon their mistakes with a certain amount of compassion; and instead of talking against them, we should help them through their times of trouble.

ROBIN ANN STONE.

Sterling Park, Va.

Low Pathos

Richard Nixon in his last address to his constituents as their President, served them as he had consistently for the preceding five years—in a manner which left much to be desired.

That night President Nixon enjoyed a national, prime-time broadcast audience, probably for the last time in his life. He had the opportunity then to be a magnanimous man, to be a healer of our national soul, and he let that opportunity pass. With one sentence, Richard Nixon could have earned the eternal gratitude of his people: he could have said, I was wrong, I broke faith, I broke the law, and I am sorry.

In leaving these words unsaid, Richard Nixon has left his die-hard supporters, that unconvinced 20 or 25 per cent, a single wobbly leg to stand on. Millions of Americans now living will carry with them to the grave the bitter and divisive conviction that a great President has been hounded from office by the media and a thankless Congress. With a few words, our former President could have enlightened most of these people and taken a giant step in the direction of healing our country's traumatized psyche.

The essence of dramatic tragedy lies in the heroic stature of the fallen protagonist. The near-final scene at the White House showed the American people for one last time that what we have in Watergate is not high tragedy, but agonizingly low pathos.

RAYMOND S. SWEENEY.

Takoma Park.

People vs. the Press

"Government of the press, by the press, and for the press". And God help any politician who doesn't live by that rule.

Being elected by a large majority of the people doesn't count. If the press and power structure don't like the people's choice—the people are out of luck.

I believe that if the press had investigated Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson with the diligence and vengeance it has applied to President Nixon—President Nixon would look like a saint.

I hope you're enjoying your victory.

FRANCES ASHMALL.

Yonkers, N.Y.

This Crucial Moment

With the departure of Mr. Nixon from the White House, it might be appropriate to pause and reexamine the elements of our society which led to such an event. These elements seem to be as much our heritage as the Constitution and form our creed of "success at any cost" and "becoming No. 1" and "making it to the top." Sadly Mr. Nixon a real American man, fell prey to all this nonsense and even more sadly, he alone did not stoop to climb this well-advertised, but rickety ladder. Far from being an anomaly, Mr. Nixon in his ethics is right in step, very much in tune and with it all, so much so, I believe, that he doesn't even realize that to abridge somebody else's rights is something reprehensible. No doubt, he merely believes he lost the game, finally outmaneuvered.

When Rap Brown said some time ago that "violence is American as apple pie" more people should have taken him seriously. Now, at this time, rather than going back to "business as usual" and keeping the wheels moving, the machine going, the transition smooth, etc. we should stop, come to a dead halt and ask some basic questions, such as: what are the wounds to be healed that everybody is talking about, aren't there more and perhaps more dangerous problems in the body politic that should be discovered and cured, and where are we going in this big machine that always has been kept operable? At this crucial moment, we should

sacrifice some of our great American efficiency in order to do something maybe unAmerican, that is, think and examine ourselves, if need be even clumsily. This we should do in the interest of humanity—our own.

FRANCES MADDOO.

Chevy Chase.

Escape the Consequences?

Is it to be the new policy of America that an elected official who is guilty of a crime, when caught and cornered, can tender his resignation and thereby escape all consequences for his criminal act and at the same time receive the emoluments and benefits reserved for men who honorably served their country in that office?

For my part I cannot conceive that it is to be the policy of this nation of freedom and integrity that honest, hardworking citizens are going to be



caused to bear the burden of taxes in order to give a premium to one who is guilty by confession of a felony while occupying the highest office in the land.

If it is to be thus, what is there to deter a member of Congress, a member of a state legislature, a member of a city or county council, a building inspector or a policeman on the beat, who commits a crime and is caught and cornered, from tendering his resignation and saying you can't convict me and you must give me the emoluments due a man in my position who has completed honorable service because I resigned?

Such a situation is so alien to every concept of decency and the stewardship of public office that is embedded in our American way of life that it defies the credulity of any decent man.

FRANK L. BALL JR.

Arlington.

'Moralist Newspapers'

I trust you are finally satisfied with the current state of affairs in the White House. Or, do you plan to pursue Richard Nixon into his own particular Hell in an effort to extract even further flesh.

I think it is ironic that his problems stemmed primarily from the publica-

tion of leaked state secrets by super moralist newspapers such as The Washington Post. His attempt to stem this flow of illegally released information, for the good of this nation, was his undoing.

CHARLES J. BRAY.

Potomac, Md.

'Disgusting' Exhibition

I have never seen a more disgusting exhibition than the televised view of the mob in front of the White House on the night of President Nixon's resignation. It was reminiscent of the beasts who have urged desperately unhappy would-be suicides to "go ahead and jump," or of those drop-outs from the human race who listened to and watched the prolonged murder of Kitty Genovese without trying to help her. Whatever the sins of the President, he did not deserve this display of atrocious bad manners and insensitivity to his suffering and that of his family. Has it become the "American way of life" to kick a man when he is down? If so, God help us.

VIRGINIA M. HAWKINS,

Washington.

For Our Children

For the sake of our children, the constitutional impeachment process must go on to remove that excrement from the conscience of America.

ARTHUR J. LEVIN.

Washington.

Unused Law

Maybe the no-knock law should have been used at the White House.

BETTY LUGINBILL.

Tucson, Ariz.

Does the System Work?

As Messrs. Kraft and Raspberry have stated recently, we really should not feel too secure in the belief that the system works. What is perhaps true is that given extraordinary good luck, the system can be made to work. What is also very true is that the next President who wishes to abuse the office can get away with it simply by not taping himself.

How then can the system be made to work? It seems to me there is enough constitutional machinery, namely, the separating and balance of power to make it work. The inference is that Congress has let itself be usurped of its share of that power to the extent that a President like Nixon can thrive. My specific suggestion is that the Congress subject itself frequently to public exposure as it did in the case of Judiciary Committee hearings.

As a practical matter, such exposure should be limited to the serious issues of the time. Thus, issues like gun control, campaign reform, Defense appropriation and foreign aid to Turkey (our

supplier of heroin) would receive the kind of serious debate and responsible action they deserve. As a side benefit, it would give the public a larger base from which to select its future Presidents. There are some good people in Washington.

MARVIN J. GINSBURG.

Silver Spring.

Pound of Flesh

You have gotten your pound of flesh! I feel that our nation is the loser. We threw out the baby with the water.

I feel the news media should be impeached. You have shown that you — the news media — can make and break a President. Remember, the noose was around his neck *before* any positive evidence was available and he was proven guilty from the start of Watergate by your paper.

I no longer trust or read your paper. I know the views will be slanted, biased or prejudiced to suit the views of the press. This has been the most disillusioning thing in my life. I always thought the printed word was true and accurate and above all, objective.

It was obvious that because of Nixon's personality, his need for privacy, his desire to be left alone to do his job, was distasteful to your newsmakers who prefer a 'Mr. Personality' or a 'Mr. Compliant' but dull, Ford-type.

What really, really makes me sick is the large number of people who have inflicted all their hate on him by not being satisfied with his resignation but who now want to tear his carcass piece by piece like a bunch of vultures. What a sad, sad commentary this is on our people.

The purpose of impeachment is to oust a President if guilty. He is ousted, so let it lie there and get on with the peoples' business. Enough of Watergate!

Where is compassion and understanding? His biggest mistake was that he was caught by two stupid errors by stupid underlings who made the dumb decision to break into the opposition's headquarters; and his (Nixon's) attempt to try to cover it (and how many politicians would not have tried to cover-up the stupid errors by their subordinates?). His second mistake was not to destroy his tapes. Without those tapes you would never have had a convincing case.

BEE SMALL

Bowie.

Amnesty for Others Too

If the mood of the country is to give Nixon amnesty, i.e. no impeachment, no indictment, then all the other Watergate conspirators, some in prison, some awaiting trial, should be given amnesty. Let us include the draft dodgers who did not want to travel half way around the world to kill Vietnamese people in an undeclared war. Let us give amnesty to all these political prisoners who have committed no crimes of violence, wipe the slate clean, and start to work on our economy and international problems with coordinated energy and goodwill.

DEE MORGAN.

Washington.

A Better Chance

Mr. Nixon wants his legacy to be that our children have a better chance to live in peace rather than dying in war. I do not wish further punishment on Mr. Nixon but it is difficult for me to accept him free receiving full presidential financial rewards while our sons remain in exile and jail for their honest moral conviction in opposing killing in a war started in duplicity by Mr. Johnson and continued in duplicity by Mr. Nixon.

RONALD SWIREN SHEINSON.

Silver Spring.