

# A Severe Political Blow...

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The strange business of the erased White House tape may not be the last nail in the President's political coffin. But in the mild language of the new Republican leader of the House, Rep. John Rhodes of Arizona, "it certainly isn't going to help."

There are other developments in the wind that are not going to help, either. For example, a friendly warning has now been passed to the President by influential members of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation. The warning was that he really must "get his tax problems solved" before the committee goes to work in earnest.

This committee was chosen by the President as the one most likely to be favorable to him. Yet on the evidence disclosed by the President himself, leading committee members more and more lean to the view that there was no justification for the large tax deduction taken for the Nixon vice presidential papers. The view is based on the technicality that the gift of the papers was not "completed" prior to the cut-off date for gifts of this type.

Unfortunately, the technicality is very much part of the law; and a gift that was not "completed" until after the 1969 cut-off date is undoubtedly non-deductible. If the President heeds the warning, therefore, he will have to make a horribly unpleasant choice. Either he must admit error and belatedly pay the resulting taxes and penalties. Or he must simply hope against hope for a different kind of committee report, despite the intimation that an unfavorable report is a serious likelihood.

To make this matter worse, the Joint Committee is expected to complete its work as late as April. So a report that the President has failed to pay a very large sum owed to the Internal Revenue Service—if this is indeed the out-

come—will almost exactly coincide with the payments of painful sums to the IRS by just about all the voters in the country.

It now seems to be the rule, in truth, that each great trouble encountered by the President is hardly out of the way, before another trouble, equally great, crops up to make new headlines. Meanwhile, another dangerous aspect of Richard M. Nixon's political situation is now beyond any reasonable possibility of doubt. In brief, the President can no longer count on real aid or support from the majority of Republicans in the House and Senate.

Representative Rhodes, for instance, spoke at a fund-raising dinner for a fellow Republican in Pennsylvania over the week-end. This was prior to the hammer-blow of the erased tape, and the House Republican leader is one of the more old-fashioned partisans in Congress. Yet Rhodes spoke of Republicans running in this year's congressional election as members of a "new coalition" having no special link with the President. According to the Philadelphia Bulletin, Representative Rhodes continued:

"Republican congressmen and senators didn't get any help from Mr. Nixon in 1972, and they will be conducting their own campaigns in 1974."

For any practical politician, such a statement, coming from such a source, is a signal that can be read across a continent. It means that in Congress, the aim of most Republican members will be to put the maximum amount of space between themselves and the White House. Hence it is even clear that at least one or two Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee are thinking about casting favorable votes for a bill of impeachment.

Here, of course, is another dreadful hurdle that is looming higher and

higher before the President. In sharp contrast to the Senate Watergate Committee's Sam Dash, the Judiciary Committee's majority counsel, John Doar, is plainly going to conduct a most sober inquiry. He has firmly cut off himself and his staff from any kind of public contact, for instance. But in the present poisonous atmosphere, it is doubtful whether the Judiciary Committee would heed John Doar, even if he advised strongly against a pro-impeachment vote. The best nose-counters have in fact concluded that a majority of the committee already wants to vote a bill of impeachment. The White House has been so advised.

How the whole House will vote, if

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and when a bill of impeachment is brought before it, is certainly a much more open question. The point, here, is that a great many members of the electorate understandably have a genuine horror of the whole impeachment procedure. Moreover, these people who hate the idea of impeachment include large numbers of those who would be both pleased and relieved by the President's voluntary resignation.

The truth seems to be that a majority of the voters would much like the President to resign, whereas nothing like a grass roots pro-impeachment majority has emerged as yet. The dilemma for the House is obvious.