

## 'Reasonable Doubt'

The demeanor of President Nixon is seriously demeaning to the Office of the Presidency he so vocally seeks to protect for future presidents.

His latest refusal to turn over the tapes and instead foist on the American people a censored version of them in transcript form, is unacceptable.

Even in the land of grassroots, precinct-level politics, where a 50-person poll still puts Nixon in good stead in Frederick County, there is a groundswell of opinion that a House drive for impeachment may be the only way to resolve to the satisfaction of the people this historic dilemma of President Nixon.

There was little doubt expressed at the recent Frederick County Republican kickoff that the party and the welfare of the nation was being pulled down by the current resident of the White House.

Once again, as in almost every public appearance in defense of himself since Watergate, it is a matter of "too little and too late."

The question multiplies in each instance — What, if anything, is the President trying to hide from the people. He would have done well to cough up all the tapes and more last week instead of clouding the scandals of his administration even more with those censored transcripts which are unintelligible. If the tapes are likewise so garbled, what in the world would Mr. Nixon lose by making them all public?

As he fully predicted, in trying to anticipate and weaken the arguments of his opponents, his release of some 1,200 pages of transcripts of Watergate tapes has fully subjected President Nixon to further "embarrassment, speculation and ridicule" by not only his opponents, but by those who had been his most ardent supporters.

The President has insured a continuing confrontation with the House Judiciary Committee by refusing to turn over the tapes themselves.

Instead of writing a dramatic finish to Watergate once and for all and confounding his enemies, he has only engendered new suspicions that even now

something is being held back and that the whole truth about his involvements in or knowledge of the Watergate cover-up has not yet been told.

Only by hearing the actual tapes, by comparing them with the White House transcripts and having them subjected to examination and enhancement by electronics experts, can the members of the impeachment investigating committee satisfy themselves, and in turn the American public, that the transcripts are an accurate and complete rendering.

The compromise offered by the President, to permit committee chairman Peter Rodino and ranking Republican member Edward Hutchison, to come to the White House to verify the transcripts against the tapes, is, like everything else he has done for the past year, too little and possibly too late.

While the conversations between Mr. Nixon and his former advisers, John Ehrlichman and H. R. Haldeman and former council John Dean, fail to substantiate allegations and conscious wrongdoings on his part, neither does he emerge from them as a man determined to get to the bottom of the Watergate affair at whatever cost.

On the contrary, they show him as chiefly concerned in late 1972 and early 1973, with how to stop the unfolding revelations — at this point or that point, but in any event short of the Oval Office door.

Far from giving the picture the man inspired by "the lift of a driving dream," these infamous discussions recorded at the seat of the most important office in the world show him under the drag of a nagging nightmare.

They also reveal a chief executive in the dark about the actions of his own subordinates, and as a man given to profanity and coarse comment about other people. The repetitious appearance in the transcripts of the parenthetical phrases "expletives deleted" or "characterization deleted" are probably more damaging to the President's image than the actual words would be.

None of this, of course, is grounds for impeachment, and to

repeat, there is no clearcut evidence of criminal behavior by the President. When the public has had time to digest this mass of information it may well be that the cry for impeachment will be muted.

In the short run at least, Mr. Nixon has bought a little more time for himself and has succeeded in driving a wedge between Republicans and Democrats on the Judiciary Committee over the question of citing him for contempt of Congress or continuing to demand release of the tapes.

But it will have been a Pyrrhic victory. By being more candid than any American president ever has been in history, by exposing more of the unedifying side of his personality, than any president was ever forced to expose, Richard Nixon may have insured his remaining in office for two more years but at the extreme price of losing the respect and confidence of the American people.

We have reached a sorry pass when it is not the belief in the fitness of a man for the office of the presidency but "reasonable doubt" about his unfitness that becomes the qualification that enables him to remain in that office.

#### NO LICENSE TO BUNGLE

Most Americans are willing to give every possible benefit of the doubt, and even more, to law enforcement officials whenever they are accused of wrongdoing.

The rationale apparently is that to do otherwise would be to place yet another hindrance in the path of the law in these permissive times and provide encouragement to criminal elements.

A recent, and very prominent, case in point was the acquittal by a grand jury in Alton, Ill., of 10 federal undercover narcotics agents charged with violating the civil rights of two families in Collinsville, Ill., during raids on their homes for nonexistent drugs.

Although there was no question that the agents, dressed like hippies, had forcibly invaded the homes without warrants, and although the plaintiffs testified that they were verbally terrorized and physically abused and their property extensively damaged, the jury found that the agents had acted in the performance of their duty and could not be held criminally accountable.

Here again, the possibility that a finding of guilty would cause rejoicing among illegal drug users and pushers was a theme hammered on by the defense. The agents were portrayed as "kids" who had simply made an honest mistake.

The jurors heard and weighed the evidence and, it must be presumed, reached an honest verdict. But if their decision can be viewed as a discouragement to lawbreakers, it would be tragic if it were taken by law enforcers as an encouragement to irresponsible behavior on their part. Carried out in the line of duty or not, the Collinsville raids were incompetent, bumbling and unnecessary.

If this is the only way we can fight crime, then we have already lost the war.

It would compound the tragedy if the acquittal by the Alton jury were to lead to the denial to the families involved of monetary compensation they are seeking from the government for their sufferings.