

Hanging In There at San Clemente

Down the street from the Western White House, a friendly innkeeper posted a word of encouragement on his motel marquee: MR. PRESIDENT, TO BE GREAT IS TO BE MISUNDERSTOOD. HANG IN THERE. It was perhaps the most heartening message that Richard Nixon received all week.

Day after day, the disturbing news from the East crashed upon the President's retreat like the waves from the Pacific below. First came the Supreme Court's unanimous decision that the President must surrender the 64 subpoenaed tapes to Judge John Sirica. This was followed by the defection of at least five Republican members of the House Judiciary Committee at the beginning of the committee's televised debate.

Adding to the President's woes was the release of a new Judiciary Committee volume of evidence on Nixon's income taxes. Among several embarrassing disclosures was confirmation that when, on Dec. 8 of last year, the President publicly asked the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation to look into his taxes, he had just the day before been privately notified that the Internal Revenue Service was about to do the same thing.

The Judiciary Committee volume disclosed details of that hitherto secret IRS audit for the first time. In general, they paralleled the findings of the Joint Congressional Committee. One new area of tax underpayment was disclosed. It concerned \$10,384.50 in book royalties that Nixon said had gone to the tax-exempt Nixon Foundation; the IRS found, however, that "no assignment of title to the manuscript was ever made" and the money should have been reported as personal income. The evidence shows that IRS investigators felt that without sworn testimony from the people who worked on Nixon's taxes about the numerous discrepancies in their statements to the IRS, there was insufficient proof that fraud had been committed. The IRS recommended to Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski that a grand jury look into the matter. That investigation is now under way.

During this stay, in contrast to most of his previous visits to San Clemente, the President did not dine out, go for a drive or even play golf. Early in the week he attended a private party at Budget Director Roy Ash's mansion in Bel Air, a lavish gathering of 150 old California friends and supporters. A few days later he flew into Los Angeles by helicopter to deliver his televised economic address before a sympathetic, if somewhat restrained audience of 1,700 business leaders at the Century Plaza Hotel. The speech, billed as an effort to rally Americans in the "great crusade" against in-

flation, turned out to be a rather bland primer in the theory of demand and supply (see BUSINESS).

For the most part, however, the President remained alone and out of reach in the private den of Casa Pacifica, a few hundred yards by fringe-top golf cart from his working office. Perhaps the best indication of his private thinking was offered by his daughter Tricia Cox, who declared spiritedly at the Ash party: "Innocence is innocence—and my father is innocent. If the committee votes to impeach, it will just be a political move by people who want to get Richard Nixon out of office. But they won't get away with it. This is a country of justice."

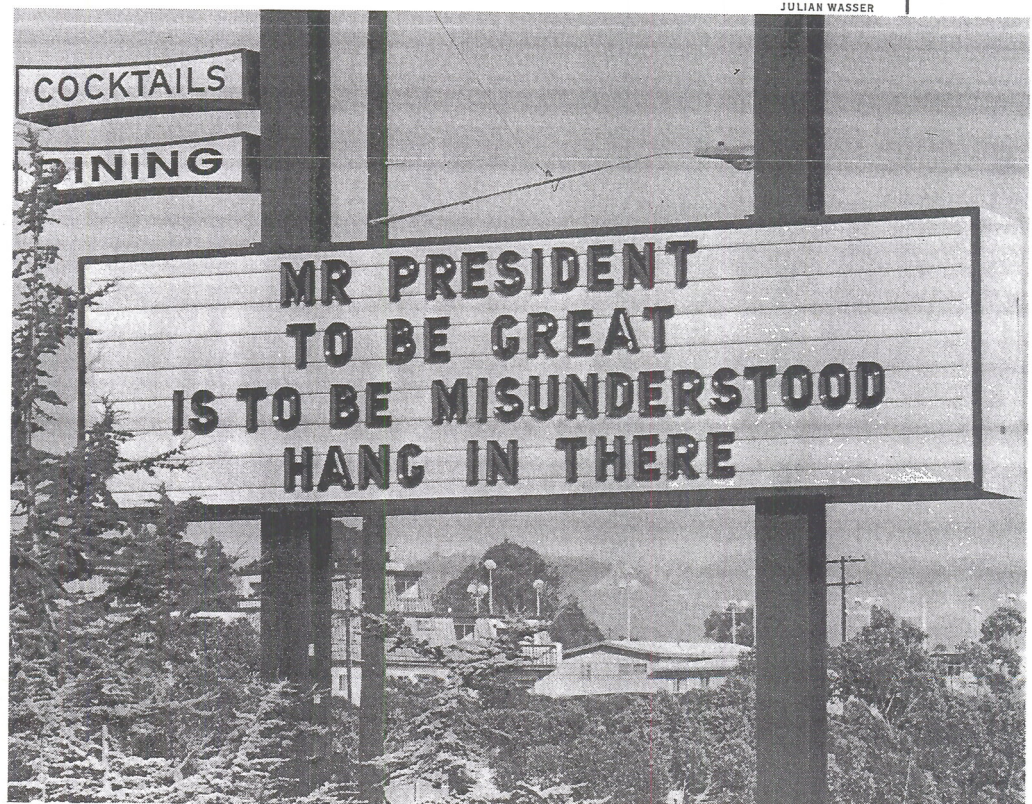
Behind the bravura, the White House staff appeared to be in genuine anguish. Recent strategy has called for the President's aides to answer every attack, always emphasizing that: 1) economic problems are far more important to most Americans than the Watergate affair, 2) the impeachment drive is essentially a partisan effort, and 3) only the overt commission of a serious crime constitutes an impeachable offense. Most White House officials still insist that in the end the President's position will prevail and he will serve out his term. But the events of last week left many with a feeling that the situation was getting dangerously out of hand.

At least one ranking official of the

Administration—not a member of the White House staff—concluded grimly last week that Richard Nixon should be thinking less about impeachment than about a sort of plea-bargaining at the very highest level. This official suggested to TIME Correspondent Hays Gorey that the President should tell Vice President Gerald Ford that he is prepared to resign provided Ford would grant him an Executive pardon for any subsequent criminal indictments. Assuming that such a procedure would be politically and legally acceptable (and this is by no means certain), it would assure Nixon that as a private citizen he could not be indicted, tried and perhaps convicted for obstruction of justice or any other alleged wrongdoing in the Watergate case.

No one could say whether the President entertained such thoughts at San Clemente last week, but it seemed unlikely. What, then, was he thinking about in his private den? An aide offered the curious detail that the President had been absorbed in a biography of Napoleon. Had he been brooding, perhaps, about the exiled French leader marking time at Elba as he waited for the tide of opinion in France to change? No one could say. At midweek, a television set was wheeled into the conference room at the Western White House for the benefit of the staff; but in his study, according to his aides, the stoic President watched no part of the committee's historic debate on his future.

JULIAN WASSER



MOTEL MARQUEE NEAR THE WESTERN WHITE HOUSE OFFERS THE PRESIDENT ENCOURAGEMENT