

A Fear of the Remedy

By Barbara W. Tuchman

The Democratic party, fearing the advantage that incumbency would give Mr. Agnew in 1976, shrinks from the idea of impeachment. So do the Republicans, fearing the blow to their party. All of us shrink from the tensions and antagonisms that a trial of the President would generate. Yet this is the only means of terminating a miscondacted Presidency that our system provides.

If it is the sole means, then we should be prepared to undertake it, no matter how uncomfortable or inexpedient. Political expediency should not take precedence over decency in government.

Fear of the remedy can be more dangerous in ultimate consequences than if we were to show ourselves capable of the nerve and the will to use a constitutional process when circumstances demand it. The show itself, if realistic, could well bring about the best solution: a voluntary termination of Mr. Nixon's Presidency. This would be a boon to the country because the Nixon Administration is already Humpty-Dumpty; it cannot be put together again credibly enough to govern effectively.

The present crisis in Government will not be resolved on the basis of whether or not Mr. Nixon can be legally proved to have personally shared in obstructing justice in the Watergate case. His Administration has been shown to be pervaded by so much other malfeasance that the Watergate break-in is no more than an incident. To confine the issue to that narrow ground seems a serious error. Forget the tapes. What we are dealing with here is fundamental immorality.

The Nixon Administration, like any other, is an entity, a whole, for which he is responsible and from which he is indivisible. Its personnel, including those now under indictment, were selected and appointed by him, its conduct determined by him, its principles—or lack of them—derived from him. Enough illegal, unconstitutional and immoral acts have already been revealed and even acknowledged to constitute impeachable grounds. The Domestic Intelligence Program of 1970, authorized by the President, and "mindboggling" in its violation of the citizen's rights, would alone be sufficient to disqualify him from office. Indeed this item is the core of the problem for it indicates not only the Administration's disregard for, but what almost seems its ignorance of the Bill of Rights.

The Dirty Tricks Department with its forgeries and frame-ups, burglaries and proposed firebombings, operated right out of the White House under the supervision of the President's personal appointees. Is he separable from them? Key members of the Committee to Re-Elect the President, who have already pleaded guilty to perjury and conspiracy to obstruct justice, were lent by or transferred from the White House. Is Mr. Nixon separable from them? Two of his former Cabinet officers are now awaiting judicial trial. Is he separable from them? His two closest advisers, his director of the F.B.I., his second nominee as Attorney General, have all resigned under the pressure of mounting disclosures. Is he separable from them? Corrupt practice in the form of selling Government favor to big business from I.T.T. and the milk lobby down have been his Administration's normal habit. Is he separable from that—or from the use of the taxpayer's money to improve his private homes?

Finally, under his authorization, the Pentagon carried on a secret and falsified bombing of Cambodia and lied about it to Congress, while the President himself lied to this country about respecting Cambodia's neutrality. There will be no end to the revelations of misconduct because misconduct was standard operating procedure.

In the light of this record, the question whether Mr. Nixon did or did not verbally implicate himself in the cover-up of Watergate is not of the essence. The acts that needed covering and the process of covering were performed by members of his Administration.

The lesson being taught to the country by Senator Ervin and his colleagues is an education itself. Next to letting the people know, the prose-

cution and legal punishment of individuals is secondary. Yet I wish the Senate select committee would enlarge its focus because the emphasis on documentary or tape-recorded proof contains perils. If, as is conceivable, the proof fails, we will be left with a Government too compromised ever to be trusted and too damaged to recover authority. In such case an impotent or paralyzed Government will, like Chiang Kai-shek's, harden its monarchical or dictatorial tendencies, already well developed in the Nixon regime. Worse, we will have demonstrated for the benefit of Mr. Nixon's successors what measure of cynicism and what deprivation of their liberties of the American people are ready to tolerate. From there the slide into dictatorship is easy.

At this time in world history when totalitarian government is in command of the two other largest powers, it is imperative for the United States to preserve and restore to original principles our constitutional structure. The necessary step is for Congress and the American public to grasp the nettle of impeachment if we must.

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