

From every part of the political spectrum, voices have been heard in the past several days calling for the President's resignation. "Calling for" is in itself a rather loose designation for statements that have been part request, part plea, part demand and part a striking of posture addressed as much to a felt public need as to the only man whose response matters. It is not to minimize the horrendous circumstances which have given rise to this outcry—or to suggest that Richard Nixon's continued presence in office is desirable—to observe that the simple act of wishing aloud that Mr. Nixon would go away begs all the hard and important questions concerning the manner and potential consequences of his doing so.

We are not concerned here to draw up a bill of particulars against Mr. Nixon's continuance in office or to argue in courtroom fashion about his guilt or innocence in specific crimes. It seems to us that an overwhelming case can be made and has been that Mr. Nixon's presidency is now freighted with more than enough liabilities of his own making to recommend his removal and replacement. But when you have stipulated that, you are still left with the fundamental question of how this is to be done in consonance with our established political traditions and juridical procedures and in a manner which promises to achieve the principal objective of so painful an exercise—namely, the restoration of sustained public confidence in the office of the presidency.

The point is that we have a constitutionally established procedure for the impeachment and removal from office of a president, but it is one that has never been fully exercised and one which a growing number of people believe could only be exercised now at a cost in prolonged public anguish and political disruption at least equal for a time to the cost of perpetuating the disabled and disgraced Nixon presidency. So the cry now is "resign." And yet the speed and seeming ease of this preferred solution could come at a high price, too: the absence of any clear, conclusive and congressionally endorsed finding concerning the President's fitness to continue, and the consequent danger of a public backlash against an event it may come to regard as unfair and for which there is no written, legal justification. The opportunities for political manipulation of all the emotions and uncertainties connected with such an event are limitless and not very attractive. It matters enormously, therefore, how the pressure for resignation comes to the President, who the sources of it are, and the degree to which the public is permitted to understand the nature and the force of the arguments for Mr. Nixon's departure from office.

The President, for example, is unlikely to be much moved by counsel in this regard from those such as

ourselves whom he doubtless regards as committed and unthinking adversaries. In fact, Mr. Nixon has shown a rather strong inclination in his public remarks on the subject so far to pretend that the dissatisfaction with his presidency is confined to some narrow and partisan collection of political opponents who have been out to "get" him since well before Watergate. Therefore, it is all the more important that respected members of his own constituency take the lead, as some to their credit already have done, in publicly expressing at some potential risk to themselves their convictions concerning the all but bankrupt condition of the Nixon presidency.

A second requirement in our judgment is that those who tell Mr. Nixon to resign should be equally committed to the commands of the 25th Amendment to the Constitution. Congress, in other words, should act expeditiously on the nomination of Minority Leader Ford to fill the vacancy in the vice presidency. In addition to the Constitutional imperatives, there are the requirements of political sense and simple fairness; just as Mr. Nixon's departure from office should be sanctioned by a genuine sentiment on the part of those who did most to elect him, so the succession should fall to someone who is responsive to that same constituency which prevailed in an election held only one year ago.

Given these requirements, which may or may not be fulfilled, it seems to us that the case for resignation is not necessarily overwhelmingly stronger than the case for impeachment. For those who cry "resign" are asking Mr. Nixon to leave office without a formal, final resolution one way or another of allegations that have been, or might be, made against him. While no formal charges of wrong-doing have been leveled against him, and none may ever be, one must be straightforward and acknowledge the possibility of the President's being pursued into private life through the courts, on criminal charges, and one must squarely face up to the convulsive public impact this could have at a time when the first order of national business would be the restoration, not only of confidence, but of pride and dignity in our public affairs.

Events themselves, coming as they do with such remorseless speed these days, may resolve some of these questions or moot them. But if they do not, the questions can neither be avoided nor postponed by those who have taken upon themselves the responsibility for forcing Richard Nixon from office. A president cannot be exorcised, as if he were some unwholesome spirit, merely repeating the incantation, "Resign!"