

Brief for the President

By Herbert G. Klein

LOS ANGELES—When one looks at the public reports on the question of resignation, it would seem that the ayes have it. Yet, this is not borne out by most polls, and I frankly doubt if it reflects a cross section of opinion. Most newspapers which have urged resignation or impeachment report readers disagreed.

There is no question that public confidence in the Presidency—indeed the Government—has been badly shaken by an incredible series of events in recent weeks. But, when one reads some of the arguments for resignation or impeachment, the impression is that public confidence would suddenly be restored in Government if the President of the United States were removed from office.

There is nothing on record to support this thesis. Rather, there is more to support the opposite.

The removal of the President would hinder our international relationships and peace efforts. Inevitably, there would be new probes to test the strength of a new President. The personal relationships built by President Nixon with such leaders as Chou En-lai, Leonid Brezhnev and Mrs. Golda Meir would be shattered. It would mean stepping back two or three years at a time of critical problems and major opportunities.

Despite weeks of probing by prosecutors, grand juries and the varied legislative committees, no one has come up with solid evidence to contradict the President's most recent statement: "I have not violated the trust placed in me when they elected me as President of the United States."

I believe there are real doubts in the public mind, but the President deserves the opportunity he asked for to "do everything that I can to see that any doubts as to the integrity of the man who occupies the highest office in this land—to remove those doubts where they exist."

He is moving to do so.

Certainly the public is not going to stand for an impeachment effort based on partisan charges regarding the use of Presidential power, impoundment of funds, or the use of war power in Indochina. Impeachment will take solid negative Watergate evidence.

The issues are whether the President can be believed and whether he can effectively govern the nation. That he still is able to govern effectively today is most dramatically apparent in the Middle East.

In my opinion, he will continue to govern effectively unless the shouts of the critics finally produce a completely negative response to his achievements. But we do see this mounting negative campaign, some of it voiced by sincere, well-meaning critics, some vocalized by ideological opponents who smell fresh blood. The battle has shaped up to be one more of opinion than fact, but the critics have used the media effectively and the question is how long will the turmoil continue?

What is the record?

On the negative side, it is clear there has been deplorable and probably illegal abuse of power by some, and lack of candor by the White House in handling the whole affair. One also can be rightly critical of some Presidential appointments.

On the other side, despite the pressures, the President has carried out his stated objectives, particularly in the foreign policy field where there is less dependence on Congressional support. His achievements, treading through the mine fields of diplomacy, have been unprecedented.

A year ago the American voters made a clear-cut decision on the Presidency, a decision based on issues, not personality. The President didn't win in a landslide because of his public smile or TV image, but because of policies where the differences were clear-cut. Unfortunately, the critics would like to ignore this.

Some are worried because the President showed hostility to the press at his news conference. I think that was a mistake, but, again, I think the hostility shown by the press was equally bad. The vendetta helps neither the Government nor the press. More so, it does not help the nation at this critical time. It is time for a truce.

The press corps, which conducted itself generally fairly with little partisan emotion in 1972 and 1968, suddenly is caught in an emotion-filled swirl of leaks, rumors and articulate Presidential critics. The balance in

1972 has not been apparent in 1973, and emotion too often clouds reporter judgment. The fault is not entirely press-manufactured. The Administration has not been fully forthcoming and some of the normal spokesmen have been hiding. The hate syndrome is there, too.

What is needed is more humility on both sides—Presidential and press. The street is not one way.

The final question pertinent to the debate is can the President stand the pressure?

Those who have been in personal contact with the President find him remarkably well, both physically and mentally. Like any man, he has his moods, but his strong mental discipline has stood up against critical battering before. Crisis is a part of life for him.

To those close to him he appears analytical, calm, and more than anything determined to overcome all odds in pursuit of what he believes is the national interest.

Those who agree that it is time to move ahead with the nation's business will find that neither resignation nor impeachment will accomplish that.

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