

Call of Conscience

In calling on President Nixon to resign as an "extraordinary act of statesmanship and courage," Senator James L. Buckley has aligned himself with a broad spectrum of opinion that places the nation's interest above partisan loyalties. The crux of the Senator's message is that only by stepping down "now" can Mr. Nixon serve "the interests of the Presidency." This appeal is diametrically opposed to the view propounded by Mr. Nixon that he must cling to his office in order to save the Presidency.

Senator Buckley's announcement, breaking a long silence on the matter, suggests that Mr. Nixon is not succeeding in his frantic efforts to hold the support of his party's conservative wing. There can be little comfort for Nixon loyalists in the New York Republican's assurance that he does not consider the President "legally guilty of any of the hundreds of charges brought against him" by sections of the media. A man of Senator Buckley's strong views would hardly have added his voice to the bipartisan call for the President's resignation if he were not convinced that Mr. Nixon has seriously abused his mandate and his office.

The point at issue is eloquently expressed in Senator Buckley's judgment that "the character of a regime always reflects and expresses the character of its leader" and that the leader's aides and agents "do what they sense and believe he wants them to do."

Rejecting the morally bankrupt refrain of Nixon apologists who justify Watergate by portraying political corruption as the normal state of governmental affairs, Senator Buckley called the Watergate situation "different not only in degree but in kind from any other in American history."

By any valid yardstick of executive responsibility, Mr. Nixon has demeaned the Presidency. Senator Buckley's call for resignation now is clearly an appeal to the conscience of his own party to exercise its special responsibility to press for restoration of the integrity of American government.