

## Verdict for the Defense

The acquittal of John N. Mitchell and Maurice H. Stans of charges stemming from a secret cash contribution to President Nixon's re-election campaign represents a notable victory for the defense in an historic case. It substantially vindicates the two former Cabinet officers and the American system of justice which gave them their day in court before a jury of peers.

The verdict of a Federal Court jury here, however, touches on only one relatively small aspect of what former Attorney General Elliot Richardson described only yesterday as a "cumulative pattern" of charges surrounding the President which has emerged in the wake of the Watergate disclosures. Throughout the trial, lawyers for Mr. Mitchell and Mr. Stans in fact constantly stressed the distinction of their clients' case from Watergate-related episodes. The outcome, therefore, cannot significantly affect the broader case for impeachment of President Nixon that is beginning to take shape in Congress.

The Mitchell-Stans trial is not the first court action, and will not be the last, involving former close associates of Mr. Nixon. Eight one-time White House aides already have been convicted of illegal activities since the Watergate burglary in June, 1972. Two others have pleaded guilty to charges growing out of 1972 campaign activities on behalf of the President. Seven more, including Mr. Mitchell, face trial next September for allegedly conspiring to cover up the Watergate episode.

It is to the Congress, however, that the Constitution assigns responsibility for investigating and deciding the ultimate question—whether the "cumulative pattern" of fact and accusation, suspicion and denial, acquittal and conviction adds up to a case for Presidential impeachment. The Mitchell-Stans verdict in no way diminishes this responsibility, nor does it detract substantively from the broad range of serious questions concerning Presidential conduct that remain unanswered.