

The Perils of Presidential Resignation

Those who are joining in the rising clamor that the President should simply resign forthwith, thereby saving everybody a lot of pain and trouble, are proposing the worst possible resolution to one of the gravest issues in our history.

"Let's get it over with" has an appealing ring; the only trouble is that it is dangerously simplistic. In the first place, everybody knows that in the current circumstances "resignation" is an euphemism for morally firing the President. In the second place, ugly as indeed are the White House transcripts dealing with Watergate, there is at this point a respectable doubt as to whether Mr. Nixon has committed impeachable offenses as distinguished from acts that were shockingly bad in themselves.

But there is a third point that dwarfs all others, and it is this, offered in ABC

form: The United States has something called a Constitution. This Constitution stipulates that in one place and one alone a President of the United States be rightly tried for such as high crimes and misdemeanors and there cleared or convicted.

This place, of course, is the Congress of the United States. The somber search for truth and justice must begin in the House, which must first determine whether to impeach (indict) the President. The somber search for truth and justice must then, in the event of an impeachment, go to the Senate, whose members would try the President as jurors presided over by the Chief Justice of the United States, Warren Burger.

This is the high and the true way to try this case. "Resignation" would avoid or evade the true way. If the President has not in fact committed an impeach-

able offense—and it must be remembered that we do not yet know the answer to that crucial question—"resignation" would become the most massive injustice we ever knew.

If, on the other hand, the President has in fact committed an impeachable offense, "resignation" would defraud justice and cheat the right and proper demands of history that this affair be explored with due process, and due process alone, to its very end.

The politicians can do what they like; the "media" can do what they like. For my part, I am not about to put my private judgments, hunches or feelings above the magnificent constitutional processes of this nation. Nor am I about to remain silent while others demand the easy way out. It seems to me that they have not thought through the possible consequences of a "resignation" that would in common

truth be a booting out of a President of the United States.

It is an inescapable fact that any ouster of this particular President, even if accomplished in the most scrupulous of due process, would have the effect of overturning an immense popular mandate given to that President less than two years ago.

Millions of Americans are going to believe that he was unfairly hounded from office if he leaves it, no matter how. Bitter divisions we don't need in this country—and most poignantly we don't need them if the President is compelled to leave office by whatever method. Let us therefore rely upon the constitutional method and only on the constitutional method to hold divisiveness to its minimum. "Hurry up" are words that don't belong anywhere in this tragic business.