

CHICAGO TRIBUNE BACKED ON NIXON

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Most Readers Support Call for President to Resign Editor to Be Impeached

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By SETH S. KING

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CHICAGO, May 12—The Chicago Tribune has been deluged by the greatest inpouring of mail and telephone calls in half a century since the publication Thursday of its blunt editorial saying Richard Nixon was no longer fit to be President and should resign or be impeached.

These statements by readers have shown that many Midwesterners still felt the President should not be attacked. But a majority applauded The Tribune's stand.

An enthusiastic supporter of President Nixon throughout his first term and for more than a hundred years a major voice of Midwestern conservatism, The Tribune surprised many of its readers with its frank disgust over the President's actions as depicted in the Watergate transcripts, which the paper published in full last week.

By last night, the paper reported receiving about 4,000 letters and calls on the editorial. Of these, some 2,100 approved, while about 1,900 deplored it, some in bitter terms. At first, the calls ran 10 to 1 against the editorial, but by late Thursday the flow had turned in favor of The Tribune's stand.

Had to Be Said

"We knew we would alienate some of our readers who have been consistent supporters of Mr. Nixon," Clayton Kirkpatrick, editor of the paper, said. "But we felt deeply that it was something that had to be said, without waiting any longer."

When the seven members of The Tribune's editorial board had read all of the transcripts and digested them, Mr. Kirkpatrick said, they were "dismayed" that the President was willing even to listen to discussions of payoffs and schemes for cover-ups.

"We saw there was little concern for the welfare of this country, nor was there any demonstration of the moral and ethical principles we expect a President to have," he went on.

Mr. Kirkpatrick said that on Tuesday, when the White House announced it would provide no more information on Watergate and was ready for a court confrontation on the question, "the trigger was

touched."

"This meant that whatever judgment we were to make, according to the White House, was to be made on the transcripts and on the President's own statement on his income taxes," he said.

Tuesday evening, Mr. Kirkpatrick told Stanton Cook, chairman and publisher of The Tribune, that he believed the paper should publish an editorial saying Mr. Nixon should be removed from office because he was unfit.

On Wednesday morning, the two met with John McCutcheon, editorial page editor. The three were in full agreement in calling for such an editorial, Mr. Kirkpatrick said. The matter was then discussed with the full editorial board.

"There was no agonizing over it," Mr. Kirkpatrick said. "The board was unanimous in its desire to publish the editorial the next morning. Two members of the board wrote it. There has been nothing in the 36 years I've been on the Tribune that has provoked as much reaction as this."

Joseph Medill, founder of The Tribune, helped Abraham Lincoln found the Republican party, Mr. Kirkpatrick noted, and for well over a century the paper has supported, for the most part, Republican causes.

But the newspaper, he said, was not an organ of the Republican party and its editors did not participate in party affairs.

Attacked in Peoria Paper

The Tribune was attacked yesterday in an editorial in The Star Journal of Peoria, the town that John D. Ehrlichman, former Presidential assistant, often used as a barometer, testing proposals by asking, "But will it play in Peoria?"

The editorial in The Star Journal, long a Nixon supporter, charged that while Mr. Nixon "talked about throwing John Mitchell or somebody in order to have their own skins, they just talked about it. The Tribune appear to have done it." The Star Journal editorial accused The Tribune of doing this to save the Republican party.

The Peoria paper said it agreed with The Tribune that President Nixon was "devious." But it said that was not an impeachable offense and that the country could live with it.

Medill expressed the hope that The Chicago Tribune would always espouse the principals of the Republican party, but he also said the paper should never blindly support Republican candidates, Mr. Kirkpatrick said.

"In the primary this spring, we endorsed more Democrats than we did Republicans," he said. "In 1968 we did endorse the full G.O.P. slate. But that probably will be the last time we ever do that."