

Joseph Alsop

WEXPost

JUN 10 1974

Mr. Nixon's Roller Coaster: On the Upswing?

The fortunes of Richard M. Nixon have had a strong roller-coaster tendency ever since he entered political life. And now, after a long and fearful downward swoop, it suddenly seems possible that the roller coaster may start on an up-grade.

This may hardly seem credible in view of the latest revelation that the Watergate Grand Jury named the President as an "unindicted co-conspirator." Yet the signs are plain to be seen for anyone who knows how to read the signs in the Senate and House of Representatives—which is where the signs matter.

First, there is no longer any likelihood of an authoritative group of Republican leaders going to the White House to tell the President he must resign. A fortnight ago this seemed all but certain to happen at an early date—and with Sen. Barry Goldwater of Arizona leading the deputation at that. But now all that has abruptly changed. Second, it seems much, much less likely that the House Judiciary Committee will recommend the President's impeachment on grounds of criminality by a large bi-partisan majority. Even the Judiciary Committee, although though weighted against the President, has become an uncertain factor in the equation. Third, it therefore seems possible that the House as a whole may fail to produce the needed majority for a bill of impeachment.

"The plain fact is that all over the country the remaining Nixon loyalists have suddenly become vocal, angry, even vengeful."

There are several reasons for this abrupt change in the former outlook. For one thing, the acute revision produced by the publication of the White House tape transcripts has had time to die down. For another thing, great numbers of Republican members of the House and Senate have begun to hear a sharply changed song from their constituents.

The sharp change was caused by the open talk of the need for the President's resignation by leading Republicans on Capitol Hill. House Minority Leader John Rhodes of Arizona, for instance, was one of those who mentioned the dire word. Abruptly, his mail shifted from three to one anti-Nixon to eight to one pro-Nixon, with a lot of it vituperatively anti-Rhodes. And when he got home for the Memorial Day recess, Rep. Rhodes found a hornet's nest in his own district.

The plain fact is that all over the country, the remaining Nixon loyalists have suddenly become vocal, angry, even vengeful. Nixon loyalists also constitute from 30 to 60 per cent of the

voters who elected every single Republican member of the House and Senate. You can see how simple mathematics would therefore cause a strong, if reluctant, Republican consolidation behind the President.

This would count for nothing, to be sure, if it were not for the way the situation has developed within the Judiciary Committee. With regard to the money from the milk cooperatives, one House member has aptly remarked, "Everyone seems to have a lot of milk on his bib." On balance, the unpleasant ITT matter has also gone well for the President.

In consequence, Watergate and its ramifications are all that really matters, in the opinion of everyone best qualified to judge both the Judiciary Committee and the House itself. As to the Watergate evidence thus far put before the Judiciary Committee, "it's all so damned ambiguous."

This characterization was offered by one of the Judiciary Committee's most doubtful Republicans, Rep. Thomas

Railsback of Illinois. If Rep. Railsback is deeply uncertain after the whole Watergate story has been told the committee, it can be seen why a strong bi-partisan majority against the President must be counted as less likely. Nor is this all.

The "ambiguity" and the other factors have led the Judiciary Committee's Republicans to close ranks on a most vital matter. They have voted unanimously to insist that witnesses be called on Watergate and its ramifications, so that they can be closely cross-questioned by the President's lawyer, James D. St. Clair. The President's chief accuser, John W. Dean III, heads the desired witness list.

Both the Judiciary Committee's chairman, Rep. Peter Rodino of New Jersey, and his special counsel, John Doar, have been strangely but quite openly reluctant to expose the President's chief accuser to the President's lawyer. Yet they can hardly resist the unanimous demand of the Republicans on the committee.

So the committee is likely to hear a lot about several interesting subjects, such as the circumstances of John Dean's plea bargaining. In sum, there may still be some surprises. The odds are still against the President, too; but it is all very different from two weeks ago, when Sen. Goldwater and Rep. Rhodes were actively planning to ask for the President's resignation.