

SECRETARY KISSINGER's Salzburg outburst was silly and wrong-headed, a lapse—one should say a performance — befitting a 19th century Austrian foreign minister but not a 20th century American secretary of state. Dr. Kissinger threatened to resign if the questioning of his "honor and credibility" were not stopped. Does he mean that he is above questioning? That his tenure in office is so vital to "national security" that he should not be held to account for possible discrepancies in his confirmation testimony to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee last fall? That the press, for raising questions about the conduct of public officials, is more reprehensible than the officials whose possible misconduct is scanned? "The goddam fool," said Sen. George Aiken (R-Vt.), a wise man and an admirer of the Secretary's. "Can't he take it? Why, that's part of the business, being criticized."

If, as Dr. Kissinger repeatedly stated in Salzburg, he cannot function as secretary with a cloud over his honor, then plainly his best course is to do his part to remove the cloud. This he has now done, fortunately, by asking the Foreign Relations Committee to recall him, which it has agreed to do. We cannot help feeling that the committee would have done him and itself and all the rest of us a considerable service last September by pursuing the points now at issue more rigorously, even at the cost of some bruising of the Secretary. Its duty is now harder, but clear. Dr. Kissinger says "no new material" has emerged on his role in the wiretapping of several of his aides, and there is not "any reason" for him to "change" his testimony. He may, however, want to amplify it. And the committee also will surely wish to clarify the confusion surrounding not only his role in "requesting" or "recommending" (as various versions have it) the controversial wiretaps but also his particular knowledge of the White House "plumbers." The way the Secretary's many admirers on the committee can now best help him is to en-

sure that all the pertinent facts come out. For Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), soon to depart after 15 years as chairman, it is a uniquely delicate and momentous task.

President Nixon's statement yesterday on his Secretary of State requires its own word. Dr. Kissinger's honor, Mr. Nixon said, "needs no defense." If his honor does not, however, his record does, and the President is particularly well situated to help out. For if part of the fix Secretary Kissinger is in comes from public contradictions of his own devising, another part comes from the contributions to the confusion and the apparent contradictions made by Mr. Nixon. For instance, just what did the President mean by his garbled words of Feb. 28, 1973—"he (Kissinger) asked that it be done"—words now being cited to challenge Dr. Kissinger's contention that the President, not he, ordered the taps? Surely the President's esteem for his lieutenant, not to say Dr. Kissinger's value to his chief, will induce Mr. Nixon to come to his aid as soon as possible by telling us exactly whose idea it was to engage in these wiretaps and other "plumbing" activity and what part of the responsibility he would assign to Dr. Kissinger.

There is no disguising that this is a grim time. No one who appreciates Dr. Kissinger's diplomacy can want to see him resign. But there cannot be established a double standard of truth-telling and public accountability. Among some in Washington, it is true, there is a certain sense of blood in the water, a feeling that the mighty, and especially those relatively unmarked among the mighty, must be brought down regardless of the actual scope of their alleged flaws. We deplore this feeling. But we would argue that there is a relatively simple and straightforward way to deal with it. And that is for those involved—principally the President, Dr. Kissinger and General Haig—to clarify the facts of the matter once and for all.