



Playing the Game By the Rules

— Joseph Kraft

THE IMPEACHMENT current abated slightly as the House Judiciary Committee ended its general review of the evidence last week. But as so often in the past when the Watergate tide seemed to ebb, a new flood of troubles for the President is making up — this time in the Supreme Court. Moreover, there is now beginning to come home the awful price the country will have to pay if Mr. Nixon is not pushed from office.

The impeachment pace has so far been set by the impartial, deliberately balanced presentation of evidence by the judiciary committee's chief counsel, John Doar.

In the next few weeks, Doar is almost certain to begin summing up the case in a more sharply pointed way. One sure sign is that Richard Cates, a well-known trial lawyer from Madison, Wis., who has steeped himself in the Watergate cover-up, will be returning to the staff in July after a month's leave of absence.

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MOREOVER, a dark shadow against Mr. Nixon's defense is already being cast by the Supreme Court. The court has agreed to consider the merits of a subpoena by special Watergate prosecutor Leon Jaworski for tapes of 64 conversations which the White House has so far not turned over.

Indications are that at least a score of these tapes are extremely damaging to the President. Mr. Nixon had a chance to avoid the Supreme Court test by turning over a limited number of the tapes to Jaworski last month. After a two-day nego-

tiation, the President's lawyers refused to make a deal with the special prosecutor.

The nearly universal impression here in Washington is that the Supreme Court is going to decide against the President on the tapes. If Mr. Nixon defied the court, he would be impeached without further ado. His position will not be much better if he turns over the tapes to the special prosecutor, but then defies the impeachment inquiry.

The President's hope, of course, is that dramatic events — notably the trips to the Near East and Russia — will make the impeachment question seem like a trivial nitpicking quarrel with a man whose real business is running the world. Only it isn't working that way at all.

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THE EVENTS that really matter are not going well. Inflation continues high. The economy, far from picking up, seems headed toward unemployment of over six per cent at the end of the year. Less and less is being done about such problems as pollution, poverty, tax reform, and dozens of social troubles.

The upshot is that none of the problems troubling the country can be solved while Mr. Nixon is on the impeachment rack. Nor would it help if the House did not impeach him.

For the heart of our cohesion as a country is that most of us play by the rules. But to let Mr. Nixon off, the country would be declaring as official doctrine that anything goes in the United States, that playing the game by the rules doesn't count.