

An end to patience

I don't know how things are in the board rooms and the brokerage houses, but on the household level something like panic is in the air. The place to take soundings these days is not in the halls of government but at the check-out counter of the supermarket.

It is a growing suspicion that Richard Nixon and his inept scoundrels just may have done us all in. At the check-out counter they are not impressed with what Nixon said to Brezhnev in the dacha down at Yalta. They are wondering why the wretched fellow takes no interest whatever in the price of bread.

The man has feet of clay and a head to match. Every move he makes tends to convince a person that Nixon operates with an artificial reality of his own, which is another way of saying he's nuts. "You like my helicopter, Mr. Sadat? Why, expletive deleted, you just keep it as a gift!"

Whose helicopter? they want to know at the checkout counter, and how many loaves of bread will yumpty-yump millions buy?

How much is the public expected to pay for staging Nixon's diversionary marches and pageants? Especially when they merely emphasize his complete loss of contact with what's going on at the grocery stores, if ever he did give a damn about that.

Administration survivors in Washington issue statements about domestic problems, expressing either bewilderment, as with the Nixon economics people, or unfeeling arrogance, as with Brother Butz, of Agriculture.

Nobody even pretends any more that the President's domestic policies ever made a shred of sense. It's all right, the line goes, because in foreign policy (a marvelously gelatinous term) Brezhnev TALKS to him.

Congress is of no help at all in the deepening crisis. Congress moves like a half deflated blimp being pushed here and there by dwarfs in the midst of a high wind. You hear a lot of extra-legalistic nonsense about trying old Not-a-crook for outright crookedness, when crookedness is not the issue, or at any rate is the least of the issues involved in his fitness for office.

And "executive privilege." You hear a lot about that, astoundingly in the context of Constitutional discussion, when the Constitu-

tion, which is being torn to shreds in this process, authorizes nothing of that sort at all.

I'm wondering how the betrayed population means to take all this. There is cause for worry.

My own generation experienced the Depression as kids, watched our elders putting up with it patiently, and vowed in many a sophomore bull session that we'd never let this kind of thing happen to us.

How seriously did we mean this, I begin to wonder, as I observe what's happening to rents, and food prices, and prohibitive interest rates, and soaring taxes?

Perhaps the most critical situation facing us, as Nixon does his grotesque dance, is the shattering loss of confidence in our ability to make the government respond to our will. There is a dreadful feeling that the great rogues have captured it, and mean to brazen it out however we may feel about it.

I've watched this alienating and insulating effect for a long time with growing dismay, especially as we "good government" types often and earnestly counselled the young to (gulp) "work within the system."

All the time we were trying to cool things down with level-headed advice of this sort, a lot of the wild ones, particularly the impatient black radicals, were proving we were operating under a delusion.

They learned (and showed us) that the quickest and often the only way to get action out of an entrenched official was to break down his door, seize him by the necktie, drag him across his desk, and threaten to kick him down the stairs.

We deplored it. But we could not deny the effectiveness of Mau-Mauing the establishment.

Well, how do we take it now? We have earnestly petitioned our representatives to make a legal and Constitutional end of the Nixon disgrace. We have prayed politely that they make a fresh, clean start. If, while they dither, our economic world comes crashing around our ears, what then do we do? Sign more petitions?