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PRESIDENT FORD AT NEWS CONFERENCE
He said he made no secret 'deal'

Ford Defends His Pardon of Nixon

Washington

President Ford declared last night he is absolutely convinced he made the right decision in pardoning what he called a "shamed and disgraced" Richard M. Nixon. He said there was no deal and no "secret reason" for the pardon.

Mr. Ford added that the former President's acceptance of the pardon can be construed as an admission of Watergate guilt.

"I must say that the decision has created more antagonism than I anticipated," Mr. Ford acknowledged at a White House news conference. But he said it was right for the nation, for the sake of national healing and unity.

"... As I look over the long haul with a trial or several trials of a former President, criminal trials, the possibility of a former President being in the dock so to speak, and the divisions that would have existed... I'm still convinced that despite the public reaction so far that the decision I made was the right one."

Again and again at the nationally broadcast and tele-

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year, and that they would worsen the national wounds of Watergate.

"It seemed to me that as long as this divisiveness continued, this turmoil existed, caused by the charges and countercharges, the responsible people in the government could not give their total attention to the problems that we had to solve," the President said.

Mr. Ford, who as vice president said he did not believe Mr. Nixon had committed an impeachable offense, acknowledged that the unanimous finding of the House Judiciary Committee "is very persuasive evidence" that he had.

"Was the acceptance of the pardon by the President an admission of guilt?" Mr. Ford said. "The acceptance of a pardon, I think, can be construed by many, if not all, as an admission of guilt."

On other points raised at the news conference:

- Mr. Ford said that tape recordings and documents of the Nixon years are still at the White House, and will be available for use as evidence in Watergate trials. While they are deemed to belong to Mr. Nixon, Mr. Ford said they will be available under subpoena for any criminal proceeding. He said his staff is working with aides to Watergate special prosecutor Leon Jaworski to alleviate any concern in Jaworski's office about the tapes' availability as evidence.

- The President declared that "the United States is not going to have a depression." He said the over-all U.S. economy is strong, and employment is high, despite the problem of inflation.

- Mr. Ford said the United States was not involved in the actual military coup of the government of Salvador Allende as president of Chile, despite recent disclosure that the CIA financed covert operations against the Allende government. The President said U.S. efforts in that instance were to help preserve news media and political parties opposed to Allende. Mr. Ford wouldn't debate the constitutional issues involved, saying it is "a recognized fact that such actions are undertaken" by nations and that Communist coun-

tries "spend vastly more money than we do for such purposes."

- Mr. Ford said "a very major decision" will be made within a few days on U.S. efforts to help other nations meet massive food shortages. He said he hopes the United States will be able to increase its contribution to other nations suffering because of drought or other problems.

- The President said he is about to issue an executive order to make "even more restrictive" the rules that govern access to income tax returns and their availability to the White House.

Mr. Ford's news conference came at the end of a day in which he announced his conditional clemency program for Vietnam draft evaders and deserters.

In response to a question about conditional clemency on the one hand and the full and complete pardon granted Mr. Nixon on the other, Mr. Ford said:

"In one case you have a President who was forced to resign because of circumstances involving his administration, and he has been shamed and disgraced by that resignation. In the case of draft dodgers and military deserters, we are trying to heal the wounds by the action that I took..."

Mr. Ford was asked about his testimony at vice presidential confirmation hearings nearly a year ago that the American people would not stand for the pardoning of a President by his appointed successor.

He replied that had been a hypothetical question, and the situation he faced in the Nixon case was reality, not hypothesis.

Furthermore, Mr. Ford said, he had never testified flatly that he wouldn't pardon Mr. Nixon, only that "under the way the question was phrased the American people would object."

Associated Press