

The Public: Disillusioned

From almost every region of the country last week, the message for Richard Nixon was ominous. Now it was not the outcry of his traditional liberal opponents that threatened him. Instead, it was a swelling disillusionment and outrage among many of his sturdiest supporters, his natural Republican and Middle American constituency. In surprisingly large numbers Americans were making their way through the long White House transcripts—at least four soft-backed versions were selling fast—and what they learned from those complex, intimate conversations was beginning to crystallize.

In interviews throughout the nation,

shot back. Ziegler finally said he was very sorry that the *Tribune* was moved to take such a position. "I'm kind of sorry about it myself," said Kirkpatrick.

Even more startling was the apostasy of the Omaha *World-Herald*, a highly conservative paper whose support for Nixon was evident for years in its news columns as well as on its editorial page. Those views reflected the thinking not only of its owner Peter Kiewit, a construction multimillionaire and Nixon contributor, but also of the people of the state that it blankets. Nixon got his best voter percentages in Nebraska in 1960 and 1968, and only a few other states did better for him in

Government, especially the presidency. "It is a fundamental law of American politics," writes Political Analyst Michael Novak, "that whoever speaks with the power of morality on his side gains enormous practical power." With the publication of the transcripts, Nixon may have lost that power.

Said William P. Thompson, chief executive of the United Presbyterian Church: "It is almost as if the public has been admitted to the most private plotting within a felon's lair." To Rabbi Alexander Schindler, president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the presidential conversations "reek with the stench of moral decay." The Rev. Foy Valentine, head of the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, described the tone of the conversations as "utterly reprehensible, made worse by the fact that there had been such a pretense of piety." Nixon's friend, the Rev. Billy Graham, refrained from criticism, but remarked: "I think he will put what's best for the country above everything else." Graham added his homily: "The Lord is listening all the time. The Lord has got his tape recorder going from the time you're born until you die."

Nixon still seemed to enjoy his greatest continuing support among Southern conservatives and Wallaceites, with their abiding distrust of the Eastern press and television networks. Politics aside, John D. Tollerson, a management psychologist in Atlanta, said: "There is nothing immoral in his conversation as far as I know. I resent the furor and moral indignations raised by his opportunistic opponents. [Expletive deleted], lots of people swear." In Vicksburg, Miss., Mrs. Ronnie Forsythe argued that "the media acts as judges and won't let people think for themselves."

Too Tough. Such charges were echoed by Nixon supporters elsewhere. Said George A. Vossler, chairman of the Erie County, N.Y., Conservative Party: "So far, Nixon has been judged by television and the news media." Frank DiGennaro, a Baltimore photographer, insisted flatly: "I still consider Nixon this country's greatest President. His enemies never cease trying to tear him down, but you watch. He'll be too tough for them."

A nationwide TIME-Yankelovich survey conducted by telephone last Wednesday and Thursday found that Nixon has lost an important weapon in his fight against impeachment: the previously prevailing fear felt by a majority of Americans that impeachment would mean disaster for the country. While 61% of the people polled shared that fear last November, only 38% expressed such concern last week. According to the survey, only 38% of the American people wanted Nixon to remain in office. A majority, 53%, wanted him either to resign or be impeached. A Louis Harris poll, also conducted last week, found that 49% wanted Nixon impeached and removed from office, while



CUSTOMERS BUYING EDITIONS OF TRANSCRIPTS AT MANHATTAN BOOKSTORE
Now it was the natural constituency that threatened.

TIME correspondents found some willingness to defend Nixon. But across the board, among Democrats, independents and Republicans, the transcripts appeared to have accomplished a decisive shift in public opinion.

Nixon was badly damaged by a stunning series of defections among newspapers that had previously supported him. The Chicago *Tribune*, the most influential voice of conservative Republicanism in the Midwest, came out with a long scathing editorial demanding Nixon's resignation. Ironically, two weeks ago the White House had slipped an advance copy of the transcripts to the *Tribune* because the paper's publishers intended to run the full text, which they did. Shortly before the *Tribune's* presses started running with its editorial, Presidential Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler called *Tribune* Editor Clayton Kirkpatrick, long a supporter of Nixon policies, and urged him to reconsider. The record, Ziegler argued, was incomplete. "You made it so," Kirkpatrick

1972. Yet the *World-Herald* concluded last week that Nixon should resign. A remarkable number of other major newspapers that had previously supported Nixon—including the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, the Kansas City *Times* and the Los Angeles *Times*—urged his removal from office. The nation's largest newspaper, the normally pro-Nixon New York *Daily News*, stopped short of demanding impeachment, but said the President's failure to co-operate with the House Judiciary Committee "demonstrates an appalling insensitivity to his moral obligations."

Felon's Lair. "I know America," Richard Nixon said in 1970, "and the American heart is good." Now he must contend with millions of Americans who believe that they have at last peered into Richard Nixon's heart. The outrage expressed at the tapes is above all a moral anger, and Nixon, who has so often appealed to American morality in the past, is feeling the fury of a nation that is still extraordinarily idealistic about its

41% did not. In April, Harris showed a 42-42 standoff on that question.

TIME correspondents assessed reaction in various regions:

NEW ENGLAND

So strong has been their disillusionment with Nixon that New Englanders were probably less affected by the transcripts than were other Americans. In Massachusetts, bitterness over the closing of military bases and the energy shortages had already eroded much of the 45% of the vote that Nixon received there in 1972. A Boston *Globe* survey in the solidly Republican towns of Needham and Reading, which Nixon carried by 57 to 43 in 1972, found a remarkable 67% of the voters in favor of resignation or impeachment. Said Pollster Tubby Harrison: "It's really astounding. Only 30% want him to stay in office, and this is real Nixon territory."

In Maine, the jointly owned *Portland Express* and *Press Herald* swiveled around 180° from their previous support and called for impeachment. The small *Central Maine Morning Sentinel* in Waterville declared it was impossible to read the transcripts "without feeling like an embarrassed and unwitting voyeur."

Some New Englanders, of course, spoke up for the President. Bruce Callahan, an engineer from Lee, Mass., declared: "Nixon acted wisely in keeping the lid on the whole thing. If he had shot off his mouth when he first learned of it, he might have impaired the cases of a lot of people who were going to stand trial." But negative sentiment was stronger. Said Morgan James, a telephone worker in Boston: "If he was concerned with the country, he would do what Willy Brandt did in Germany and resign for the good of the U.S."

THE MID-ATLANTIC

Here, as elsewhere, a majority believes the President is guilty, perhaps impeachably so. But a battered, steadfast minority refuses to budge from its conviction that Nixon has done nothing wrong, and each side reads the tapes to buttress its view. Typical of the supporters is Bernard Shanley, a G.O.P. national committeeman from New Jersey. Said he: "The tapes have proved Nixon is not responsible for a crime, and no matter what people think of the transcripts, they do not have evidence that he committed a crime." Some Nixon supporters, Republicans, independents and even Democrats, fear the possibly cataclysmic effect of an impeachment trial. Attorney Samuel Fallk, of Scranton, Pa., was never "a Nixon fan," but he wants the President to stay in office because, in the words of Brutus after Caesar's death: "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more."

Many Republican professionals, however, were bewildered or outraged or both. Said Harry Sayen, G.O.P. chairman in Mercer County, N.J.: "If this is an indication of coming clean, I'd hate to think of what is left behind." Accord-

ing to New York Republican Assemblyman Fred Field: "On the basis of the transcripts, there is a total breakdown of the moral attitude of those at the leadership level in the White House."

Rolfe Neill, editor of the Philadelphia *Daily News*, wrote in a column: "Those who wish to package lies and call it truth are tampering with the nation's soul. The President must be impeached, and these are not high crimes, they are the highest crimes." Said Francis Laping, the Hungarian-born owner of a publishing firm in Philadelphia: "As an immigrant, it hurts me to see America humiliated like this. The President thinks he is God, but he is guilty as hell." The normally staid Baltimore *Evening Sun* editorialized: "Richard Nixon is making God-damn patsies of us all."

THE SOUTH

There seem three discernible groups in the South: 1) those who want Nixon out, no matter what, 2) the conservatives and Wallace voters who want Nixon to survive, and 3) those who, as the Atlanta *Journal* said last week, are "saturated, nay, satiated with Watergate" and wish it would simply go away. James Bryson, a buyer for a Nashville shoe store, said: "This has carried on long enough—impeachment proceedings should get under way to settle it once and for all." Ann Waldron, book editor of the Houston *Chronicle*, believes that Nixon has become "despicable—beyond the pale. He may have been ill-used by his subordinates, but anyone who would hire such people must answer for it. They were all without ideals, without compassion and with no loyalty to each other or the country." Harriet Arbuckle, headmistress of a Houston nursery school, sighed: "The whole thing is so sad. I feel we should keep a cool head and not burn our house

down now with impeachment, but find out about the next person we select as president [in 1976]."

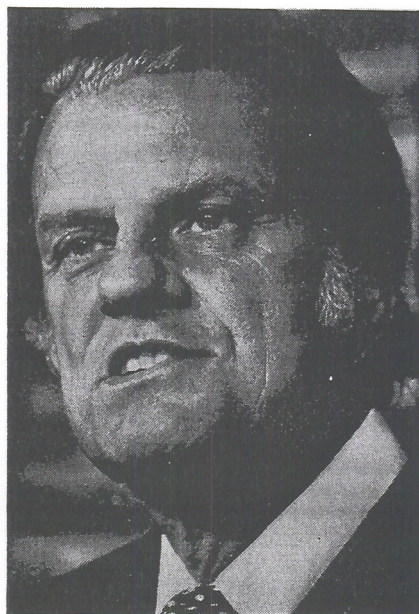
THE MIDWEST

The transcripts are changing attitudes in the Midwest more rapidly than anything the President has ever done. For years, Midwesterners tended to consider Nixon one of their own, a decent, law-abiding and hard-working man. But the character revealed by his own words seems to many Midwesterners even worse than his enemies had described. An Illinois Republican Party professional reported that about half the downstate county chairmen are shaking their heads: "A lot of them knew Nixon was a rough guy, and they figured he was involved in some way [in the cover-up]; but they never figured he was in so deep, or that he was so amoral." The other half of the G.O.P. county chairmen, he added, are just suffering in silence.

Next to Nebraska, Oklahoma was Nixon's best state in the Midwest. Until a few weeks ago, people were writing letters to the editors of local newspapers comparing the President to Jesus



REPUBLICAN ALPHONZO BELL



EVANGELIST BILLY GRAHAM

Christ, a man persecuted for his purity. But the mood changed just after the transcripts were released. Said the Rev. John Wolf, of Tulsa's All Souls Unitarian Church: "People have seen the meanness and the ugliness behind the whole thing. Nothing could be more antithetical to our system. [The President and his men] seem to have no sense of what law and order really means. They don't seem to understand what America is."

In Kansas, the Topeka *Capital-Journal* broke ranks with Nixon. Wrote Publisher Oscar S. Stauffer, an activist Republican for nearly 50 years: "It's time to hand President Nixon his hat. The transcript of the tapes dips to sordid depths . . . Walls of the White House echoing with conspiracy reminds one that gangland has profaned America's most hallowed halls . . . May the President pass into oblivion and the nation again resume its true posture."

THE WEST

As in the Midwest, the week went fairly disastrously for Richard Nixon in the Western states. In Oregon, a former key Nixon political operative finished reading the transcripts, got up from his desk, and turned his autographed picture of Nixon to the wall. Leslie Dutton, a Nixon loyalist from Santa Monica who only two weeks ago was posing with Nixon in the Oval Office after giving him a petition of support from 10,000 admirers, confessed: "We got to start thinking about the welfare of the party, and where this leaves the President, I just don't know."

New Mexico G.O.P. State Chairman William Murray Ryan said bleakly: "The effect of the transcripts has been devastating." Los Angeles Republican Congressman Alphonzo Bell had mail running 55 to 45 in favor of Nixon after the President's speech. But then a second wave of letters came in reflecting reaction to the transcripts themselves. His letters were 5 to 1 against Nixon.

Republican leaders in California, Colorado, Oregon, Arizona and New Mexico agreed that while there remains a significant number of Nixon loyalists in the party, the majority believes Nixon should step down as quickly as possible. They also concur that many people found the transcripts too diffuse and confusing to significantly add to their previous judgments of presidential guilt or innocence. What disturbs the public, they said, was the bad language and the coarse, vindictive tone of the conversations. According to Nancy Mucken, a Portland, Ore., housewife: "I hadn't really made up my mind about Nixon and Watergate until I read the transcripts. But now I am very concerned. I think he is a very corrupt man." Whatever the truth of such suspicions, Colorado Republican State Chairman Bill Daniels undoubtedly expressed the opinion of most Americans: "The whole Watergate mess has gotten out of hand, and we've got to get it settled quickly."

"Nixon Has Gone Too Far"

A sampler of editorials and columns last week from newspapers calling, for the first time, for Nixon's resignation or impeachment:

CHICAGO TRIBUNE

We saw the public man in his first administration, and we were impressed. Now in about 300,000 words we have seen the private man, and we are appalled.

He is humorless to the point of being inhumane. He is devious. He is vacillating. He is profane. He is willing to be led. He displays dismaying gaps in knowledge. He is suspicious of his staff. His loyalty is minimal. His greatest concern is to create a record that will save

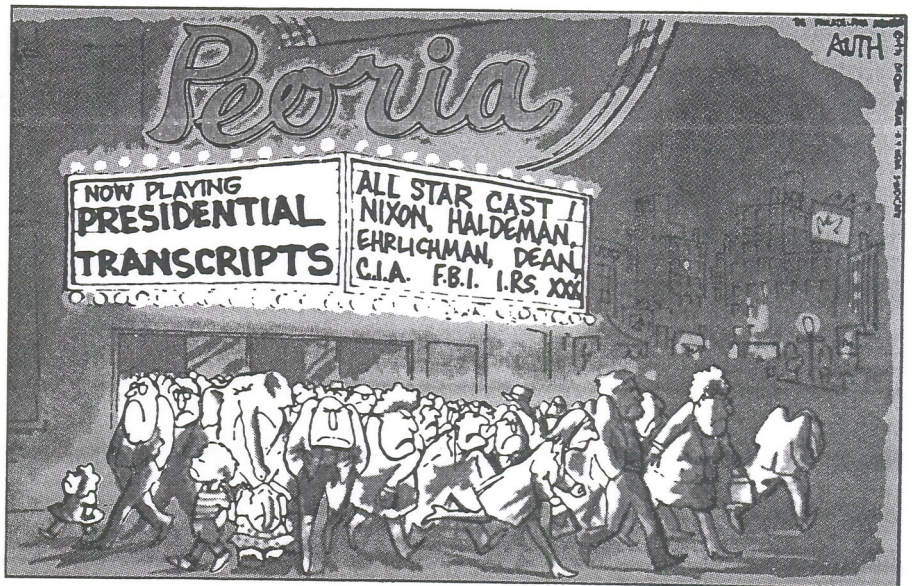
zarre, if it would help him do that. Some will ask what other Presidents would have done under similar circumstances. They will say that dirty tricks and Watergate break-ins and cover-ups are just politics. To which we would reply:

If the revolting picture of conniving and deception revealed by the White House tapes is just politics as practiced in the Oval Office of the President of the United States, it is time for the present occupant to vacate that office.

The President should resign.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

We said in this space last November that there was growing evidence to



him and his administration. The high dedication to grand principles that Americans have a right to expect from a President is missing from the transcript record.

... The evidence against Mr. Nixon is in his own words, made public at his own direction. There can no longer be a charge that he was railroaded out of office by vengeful Democrats or a hostile press. The fundamental questions have been answered. Filling in the gaps in the transcripts can only make the case against the President stronger.

It is saddening and hard to believe that for the first time in our history it is better that the President leave office than to fight and keep it. But things have reached such a state that Mr. Nixon's departure, one way or another, is the best course for the Presidency, the country, and the free world.

OMAHA WORLD-HERALD

The thrust of the 1,308 pages of the transcript is that the President was trying to save his own skin and would consider almost any option, however bi-

warrant the President's impeachment. But we did not then believe it was sufficient.

Since then there have been many new and damaging revelations involving Mr. Nixon, including the partial transcripts of presidential conversations [with aides] issued by the White House on April 30 . . .

The transcripts show that [the President's] strategy was:

—To "contain" the scandal by limiting the scope and frustrating the evidentiary rights of investigations . . .

—To "buy time" and "reduce our losses" by keeping his associates from testifying under dubious claims of executive privilege and national security.

—To "keep the cap on the bottle" by encouraging his associates to tell no more of the truth than they had to in public statements or in formal testimony.

—To contrive "salable" public relations explanations for his own failure to expose the guilty even when the evidence of their complicity was known to him.