

Joseph Kraft

Unloading a Lame Duck President

Despite all the talk of resignation or impeachment, it is still going to take a mighty shove to get Richard Nixon out of the White House. That shove can only come from the Republicans. For the alternate prospect—the prospect of a long-term lame duck in the White House—is not all that terrible for the rest of the country, including most of the Democrats.

The characteristic feature of the Nixon administration is that it has done good things against the grain of the President's inner conviction. Conversely, the administration was at its worst when Mr. Nixon was operating on his own, unconstrained by serious opposition.

In the domestic field, the chief Nixon accomplishment is the prosperity set in motion by the New Economic Policy of Aug. 15, 1971. The key elements in that policy were controls on wages and prices and a devaluation of the dollar. That is to say, Democratic proposals which the President, in a moment of need, stole.

Mr. Nixon's own program emphasized giving free play to market forces. When applied in 1969, it yielded a rise of inflation and unemployment. It was reapplied with the ending of Phase II controls last January. The result has been a soaring inflation which threatens to topple boom into recession.

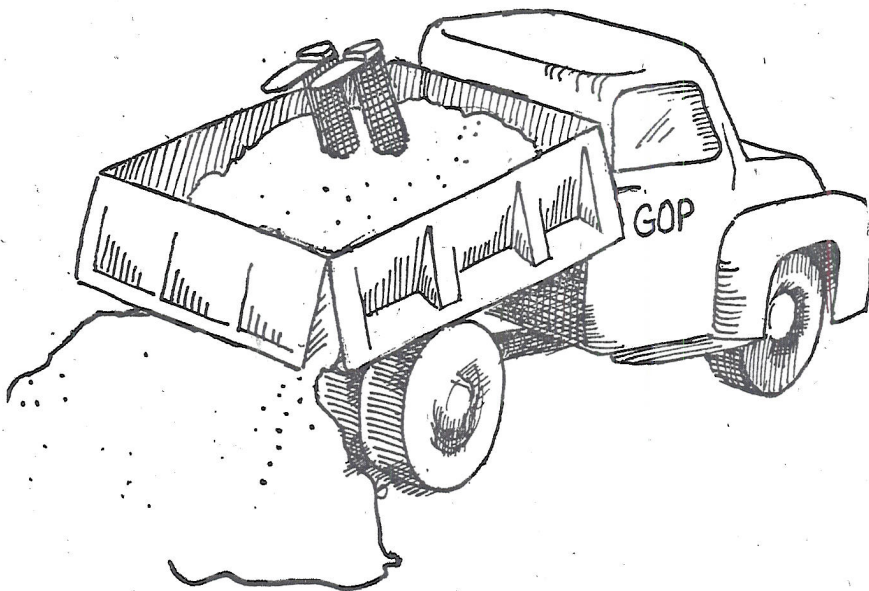
In the international field, Mr. Nixon's great achievement has been the detente with the Soviet Union, notably the arms control agreement and the end of American fighting in Vietnam. Both of those were high on the Democratic agenda.

To be sure, Mr. Nixon added a dazzling twist of his own. He engaged the Peking regime and began to play off the Chinese against the Russians. By exploiting the division between the Communist giants, he was able to maintain American military pressure in Southeast Asia far longer, and in more devastating doses, than almost anybody imagined possible.

But what, after all, did all the maneuvers achieve? The Saigon regime remains vulnerable and it looks increasingly as though the settlement in Southeast Asia can only come when the other side is given a legitimate place in the government of South Vietnam. Thus, despite the dazzling diplomacy, the Nixon administration seems only to be achieving later what the Democrats wanted all along.

The pattern of the past four years finds confirmation in present circumstances. Thanks to Watergate, Mr. Nixon's standing in the country is at an all-time low.

As a result he has been obliged to make all kinds of sensible compromises. He has had to arrest inflation with a 60-day freeze, and at least some elements of the freeze will have to be included in the next phase of the control program. He has had to set a terminal date for the American bombing in Cambodia. He has had to issue a new energy message which, for the



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first time, emphasizes conservation of fuel and research to develop new sources of energy.

No doubt many Americans will be affronted that someone as deeply involved in the Watergate mess as Mr. Nixon should continue to be in the White House. But performance does not second the feeling that a man so closely connected with such criminal behavior should cease to be president. Mr. Nixon is performing better than before. The post-Watergate Nixon is giving the country, and particularly the democrats, less to complain about than the pre-Watergate Nixon.

But that rule does not apply to his own party. For the Republicans, Watergate is a total loser. The scandal itself hurts badly enough. Moreover, as long as Mr. Nixon stays in the White

House, no other Republicans can come forward—not Spiro Agnew, not Melvin Laird, not Nelson Rockefeller, not Ronald Reagan, not, as he found to his cost, John Connally. Nor can any good issue be drawn against the democrats.

So if Mr. Nixon is going to be forced out, the action is up to the Republicans. The Senate Watergate committee under Sam Ervin may be moving to recommend impeachment proceedings, but it will go all the way only if the ranking Republican, Howard Baker, agrees. Resignation may be talked about in the first family, but it will become a reality only if the elder statesmen of the Republican Party, led by Sen. Barry Goldwater, make it plain that they want Mr. Nixon to dump himself.

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