

First Out

It is distressing but not surprising that the Rev. Theodore M. Hesburgh has now become the first victim of President Nixon's loudly proclaimed "housecleaning" in the upper reaches of the Federal establishment.

As chairman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Father Hesburgh was never one to cower before, much less cater to, the tides of popular prejudice dictating retreat in the fight against racial injustice. On the contrary, he remains insistent that the price of delay in solving the problems of race and poverty is one the country cannot afford to pay. After an election which the Administration evidently interprets as an indication that most Americans want a go-slow policy on civil rights, what more emphatic signal of acquiescence could come from the White House than the sacking of this sturdiest of battlers for equal opportunity?

The specific irritant, of course, was Father Hesburgh's accurate characterization of school busing as "the most phony issue in the country." He lost no opportunity to try to put in perspective an issue which the President, in common with most Congressmen of both major parties, had distorted into a rallying point for fear and conflict.

What made his departure inevitable was the impossibility of discrediting as the mere rantings of a leftist demagogue the reasoned testimony of this distinguished clergyman and educator, for twenty years president of the University of Notre Dame, a director of the Chase Manhattan Bank and an original appointee of President Eisenhower to the Civil Rights Commission at its formation fifteen years ago.

His expulsion now diminishes in no measure the accuracy of his challenge to America to move ahead more quickly with its unfinished human business, the solution of the problems that debase the quality of life for millions of the impoverished and excluded.
