

A Thesis That Impeachment Is Here and How

By James Burnham

Although the United States is still a junior among nations, its government, with a continuous existence of nearly two centuries, is the oldest on earth.

The fact of such survival in the face of colossal changes in its technological, social, and economic environment is proof of an astonishing power of adaptation. This may give us confidence that our nation and Government will once again manage, in one way or another, to adapt successfully to the *crise de régime*, as the French would call it, that the Watergate affair has become.

And so it is doing. We hear, more and more: Will the Senate hearings and the Cox investigation lead to the impeachment of the President? This question has already been answered. In political substance Richard Nixon has already been impeached and the impeachment process is moving forward in a form and manner appropriate to the age of mass media. A verdict will be rendered.

The form is not precisely that sketched—rather vaguely—in the words of the Constitution, but it is sufficiently close to the spirit. A committee of the Senate, the body charged by the Constitution with the responsibility for impeachment, is the primary

tribunal. Through the magic of television, the mass assembly of the citizens becomes, much as the assembly of citizens in the trial of Socrates, the jury. Everyone knows who the defendant is.

Through that same TV magic, combined with the magic of the electronically fed press, the defendant can at any time and as fully as he may wish, either in his own person or through his attorneys, proxies, friends or agents, communicate his own case to the sitting jury. This he may do via the Senate committee, whose ears and attendant cameras are open to whatever use he may wish to make of them. If he prefers, he may summon the global eyes of the cameras at any moment he wishes to any place and time of his choosing.

The evidence and the arguments are not all in, and the time for the verdict therefore not yet arrived. But the verdict will come, even if the defendant pleads a meta-Fifth amendment. It will be signaled by the opinion polls and by the public attitudes, words, and actions of members of Congress, "leading citizens," and other political sensitives. And it will be unavoidable.

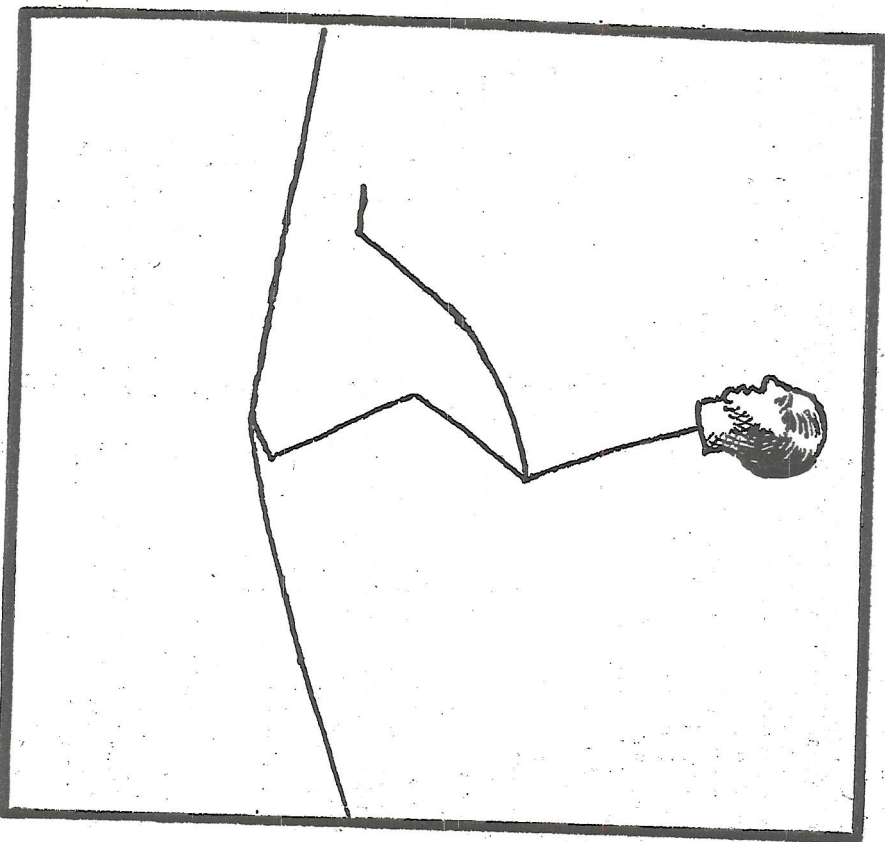
The President's "approve" rating has dropped from its January 68 per cent to 44 per cent as of a fortnight before the John Dean testimony. If it is con-

tinuing down, and if more and more of the sensitives impose The Silence, as some are already doing ("In our visits to Illinois and California, we were stunned by the fact that not a single Republican, political, liberal or conservative, had a word of defense to say for the President," reported Evans and Novak, with that underlining, June 20), then Richard Nixon will be unable to govern. He will have to resign. If he does not, Congress will complete the process of impeachment in short order according to the prescribed formalities.

If further witnesses, spokesmen and evidence, and the President himself succeed in reviving his credibility, his moral standing, and his legitimacy in the eyes of the jurors—and the signals would in that event be no less plain—his ability as well as his right to govern would be vindicated. Nothing further would be heard of a formal impeachment proceeding.

The Senate hearings are being held, as every housewife knows, during the soap-opera hours. Naturally so. Soap opera is the foremost art form of the electronic age. How else but as soap opera could we produce "The Impeachment of a President"?

James Burnham is an editor of *National Review*. This article also appears today in the *Review's Bulletin*.



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