

The Conservative Leverage

By Howard Phillips

WASHINGTON — Throughout his public career, Richard Nixon projected the impression of one who is at least viscerally conservative, a man who loves his country, and who, when it seemed important enough to him, was ready to suffer any level of unpopularity to persevere on the path which duty required.

He was a man who perceived the need to restore diversity and pluralism to the public by reducing the concentration of decision-making responsibility in one place and simultaneously creating new centers of power all over America which would invite citizen participation in the context of established democratic processes.

Had he persisted in the advancement of this grand design, I have no doubt that Richard Nixon's Presidency, culminating in the 200th anniversary of the American Revolution, would have been one of those great watersheds which even liberal historians would retrospectively have perceived.

But somewhere, something went awry. Not so much Watergate itself as the manner in which the Administration responded to it; determining that survival required abandonment of the President's central domestic policy goals.

How tragic it is that Richard Nixon, who throughout his years in politics has beckoned young people to be part of a cause larger than themselves, has been yielding away pieces of his cause—our cause—in the unrealistic hope of gaining the regard or reducing the opposition of his most bitter liberal enemies. To paraphrase Churchill, those who surrender principle for safety risk losing both safety and principle.

Now that the liberal establishment has badly crippled President Nixon's capacity for leadership, their greatest fear is that Mr. Nixon might leave office soon enough for Vice President Agnew to pick up history's mandate, with the moral authority to carry forward the work which Richard Nixon began. For me, at least, this is the meaning of the charges now being directed at the Vice President.

The liberals understand that it is President Nixon's conservative friends and allies who, alone, have the capacity to bring him down. Conservatives will make that decision only if forced to conclude that the national interest requires the Vice President's succession. Many of the President's lifelong liberal enemies now speak openly of a scenario in which they connive to retain in office an emasculated Richard Nixon, divested of real power, yet permitted to enjoy the trappings and ceremony of Presidential office, while they are free to grasp the substance of power, awaiting and plotting the arrival of a new liberal reign in 1976.

Richard Nixon is too much a patriot and a man of integrity to let that scenario unfold. He cares too much for our system of checks and balances to let the institution of the Presidency become an empty ceremonial shell. If he determines that he is unable to resume effective leadership in both domestic and foreign policy—with his appointees accountable to his authority—I am convinced that he would resign rather than permit himself to become the helpless pawn of his enemies or the cause of grave systemic damage.

Conservatives have long provided Richard Nixon with his most dependable support. He has for many years been the agent of our hopes for practical leadership on behalf of the principles in which we believe. Whenever

he has been rejected and scorned by the press or liberals in his own party, he has invariably been able to rely on our support and affection.

Conservatives have largely refrained from applying the leverage of their support when disappointed with Administration policies. Particularly in the wake of Watergate, that now appears to have been a serious strategic mistake. The post-Watergate policy shifts to the left and programmatic concessions in the face of pressure clearly demonstrate that the Administration, at least for the moment, has had no guiding vision or central purpose which for it transcends in importance the simple retention of power.

It must be said that we have to be prepared to use our final leverage to hold Richard Nixon's Administration to account. As the repositories and heirs of America's constitutional tradition, [we] have a great role to play. We are in a period when our views can command majority support. If we fail to alter the course of public policy now, and let the moment pass, the opportunity for the cause of liberty may never recur.

Howard Phillips, former acting director of the O.E.O. under President Nixon, delivered these remarks before the Young Americans for Freedom.