

Perils of a Leaderless Nation

Editor — In the midst of the current stage in the seemingly inexhaustible tragedy of Watergate, both Congress and a major section of the public appear to be losing a sense of proportion which is vital to the needs of the country, and about which a word needs to be said.

When serious and extensive corruption appears in any administration it is very important that it be rooted out. The drawn out rooting-out process has gone on for a long time since Watergate first became a watchword, has reached the highest level of government, and has put a number of once powerful individuals either out of office or even behind bars. This is as it should be. Nobody stands above the law and no one should be unaccountable for his misdeeds.

We now stand at a critical crossroads, however, at which the questions we have to ask ourselves are somewhat different. It is no longer a matter of ridding ourselves, or rather our federal government's executive branch, of dishonest and indeed criminally inclined men, but of gravely jeopardizing national leadership. It is not as easy to replace a President as it is one of his advisors or messenger boys.

It is really time for a sober and fair assessment of Mr. Nixon in which all essential aspects of his presidential career are considered. This is only in the interests of our own safety, for if we really want him to be impeached or be forced to resign, we should at least know what we are losing as much as what we are gaining.

Nixon has, actually, been a reasonably good President. Every reasonably good President has his strong points. Mr. Nixon's strong points are in foreign policy, where he has accomplished a great deal, as every one knows. As for his apparent domestic failures, such as the failure to adequately stem inflation, it is obvious that he inherited an unhealthy economic situa-

tion from the previous administration with its reckless "guns and butter" policies. But the various shortcomings of Nixon's administration should not blind us to those areas where he has shown imagination and leadership.

For contrary to much expectation, Richard Nixon has become a genuinely tragic person, in the classical sense of a great man who is seriously flawed. Mr. Nixon's flaw is his chronic fear of rejection and failure combined with enormous personal ambition. His greatness is his ability to grow as a statesman and to transcend our own and foreign political philosophies that do not offer positive approaches to the grave international problems upon which the world's fate really hinges, as it does not, in the final analysis, on Watergate.

Richard Nixon has reaped the fruits of his own inclination to scheme for the success of his election campaigns, and the fruits have been very, very bitter. He has, in fact, been severely punished. But he has been punished enough. Whatever vague or more direct association he may have had with the likes of the known conspirators, it will do the country no particular good to destroy Nixon now. Everyone knows that neither Gerald Ford nor Carl Albert is fit to be President, certainly not more fit than Nixon. They would be starting from scratch. All those who have hated Nixon for 20 years, often with right, have had their revenge. He has been backed up against the wall, and he has surrendered the tapes, finally, to the court. The Constitution is no longer seriously imperiled and we should not submit ourselves to the peril of a leaderless nation.

LOWELL M. CLUCAS III.
Munich Germany.