

Now's the Time For Impeaching



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THE TIME has come to proceed with the impeachment and trial of Richard Nixon. Nothing else will clear the air and restore a sense of domestic tranquility.

I am not urging or predicting that two-thirds of the Senate vote for conviction and removal from office. I am saying simply that the House of Representatives should perform a service to the country, and perhaps to Mr. Nixon as well, by voting a bill for impeachment.

Impeachment is our country's last political resort. It is a course to be taken only at a point when no other course will suffice. We are at that point now.

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RESIGNATION is not the answer. It is politically inconceivable that the President would resign under circumstances that would transfer the White House to the Democratic party under a President Carl Albert. But even if Gerald Ford had been confirmed as Vice President, thus assuring a Republican succession, the President's resignation would come as one more unilateral act of his part: He alone would be controlling the sequence of events.

The fact of Ford's presidency would then be Mr. Nixon's sole responsibility. If the most powerful office in the free world is to change hands, under the traumatic conditions that now obtain, the change should reflect the solemn deliberate will of the Senate.

Two weeks ago I said it was nonsense to suppose the Senate would vote to convict Mr. Nixon and thus to remove him

from office. That column was written just as news was breaking of the firing of Archibald Cox and the removal of Elliot Richardson and William Ruckelshaus. The story of the two missing tapes had not transpired.

No action that Mr. Nixon himself might take — no speech, no statement, no explanation through his aides — could quell the national doubt and distrust. His one chance to salvage his administration now lies in submitting his conduct to the formal judgment of the Senate.

A resolution of impeachment, if it is to accomplish the desired end, should cover the whole gamut of charges bruited about in the past two years. The President should be indicted by the House, in effect, for criminal misconduct in the ITT case, the milk deal, the Ellsberg affair, the Watergate burglary and cover-up, the improvements to presidential property in Florida and California, and for general obstruction of justice in the matter of the tapes.

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THE TRIAL of such a comprehensive impeachment would tie up the Senate for months. But there would be this tremendous advantage: We could look to the one thing that is most desperately needed now, and that is an ending. Trials are finite. The day would come when the Senate at long last voted to convict or to acquit.

I am not certain that even his acquittal would restore his leadership, but I am convinced of this much at least: We must not drift along much longer on the rudderless course our ship of state is taking now.