

The Presidential Controversy: Examples of Recent History

To the Editor:

If President Nixon is serious in his search for historical precedent to guide him in handling his multiple dilemmas emanating from the Watergate fiasco, I respectfully suggest he stop repeating his erroneous version of Jefferson's "position" on confidentiality and start reading about two more recent figures whose problems very closely resembled his own—which is, at heart, a crisis of confidence in the man and in his Administration.

One of these leaders was Neville Chamberlain. He resigned May 10, 1940, because, he asserted, "some new and drastic action must be taken if confidence was [sic] to be restored." "The essential unity," he recognized, "could be secured under another Prime Minister though not under myself."

Actually Chamberlain had won that vote of confidence in the House of Commons two days earlier, by 281 to 200 with another 130 members of his own Conservative party absent. But he understood the significance of forty Conservatives crossing the aisle to oppose him and knew that legalities and paper majorities were insufficient bases for leadership in a democracy.

He had also listened carefully when his opposition leaders, Clement R. Attlee, the Laborite, and Arthur Greenwood, the Liberal, said they would support another Conservative as national leader but not the incumbent. That sounds strangely like some liberal support for Gerald Ford.

Chamberlain's manly decision, moreover, is in stark contrast to Mr. Nixon's insistence that impeachment is the only means for his removal.

Chamberlain was in a sense reciprocating history's kindness, for the vote was in fact on a motion to adjourn whose implications were unquestionable. But President Nixon seems bent

on forcing the American people, through their Congress and in their consciences, to undergo that agonizing process and then render a cold decision.

Yet the innocuous subject matter of that motion suggests that Congress does have an alternative to impeachment. It can advise the President of its sense about his tenure.

Another leader whose example President Nixon should ponder is Lyndon Johnson, who is even closer to home and nearer in time. President Johnson's decision March 31, 1968, amid tumult at home and abroad, that he would not seek re-election was tantamount to resignation the next Jan. 20. Even Mr. Johnson's most virulent critics lauded his announcement, knowing it meant he would remain in power ten more months.

Both men enhanced their stature after admitting to themselves that the popular will was not weaned on hysteria or partisanship.

GERALD S. NAGEL  
New York, Nov. 21, 1973

The Nation's Dividers

To the Editor:

Repeatedly and *ad nauseam* on your editorial page, on your Op. Ed. page and in your news columns you call for an "independent inquiry" into the affairs of the President.

Illustrative is your Nov. 14 editorial wherein you declare that "the most urgent need in the Watergate investigation is a special prosecutor chosen by the judicial branch of the Government and known to be totally independent of the Nixon Administration." You conclude with the pontifical pronouncement that "the public has a right to an independent prosecutor."

It has obviously never occurred to you that the public may not want an independent prosecutor, whether a prosecutor chosen by the judiciary or by the Congress or any prosecutor of any kind whatsoever. We who elected the President are utterly opposed to any prosecution of the President, whether by the judicial or the legislative branch of the Government.

The American people never elected Judge Sirica to any office or for any purpose, least of all to prosecute the President, and this goes for Archibald Cox, Elliot Richardson, Henry Petersen, Leon Jaworski, Sam Dash and any person who may be designated by any panel of judges or any panel of Senators or members of the House to conduct a prosecution of the President.

Nor did the American people elect the President to hold office by sufferance of Sam Ervin or Lowell Weicker or subject to the approval of the editors of The New York Times and The Washington Post.

We do not appreciate the hysterical cries of the Abzugs and the Javitises and the Kennedys and the Abernathys and the Meanys and the Ellsbergs and all the rest of the liberal and leftist establishment for the President's resignation or impeachment.

We consider it an affront to the dignity of the office of the President to snoop through the Presidential papers and tapes, to question their authenticity and to publish and dissect them like so many juicy morsels of sensational scandal.

Yes, you are free to exercise your right of free speech and free press, but you should realize that you are creating a divisiveness across the land that we have not experienced since the days of the Civil War.

SAMUEL J. STOLL  
New York, Nov. 15, 1973