

WXPost

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... As Congress Drags Its Feet

The comforting scenario now enjoying currency in this town goes something like this: One more major bombshell of the Cox-firing or the tape-evaporation sort, and impeachment will appear to be inevitable, at which point Richard Nixon will resign.

The reason it is so comforting is that it achieves what more and more Americans are coming to conclude would be a worthy end, and it does so without anybody having to do anything.

As the hopeful scenario would have it, the bombshell would detonate itself; the impetus for impeachment would come from the impersonal polls, and the President would remove himself from office. No need for a member of Congress to stand up and call for impeachment. No need for the House of Representatives to vote a bill of impeachment. No need for any senator to

risk being in the wrong third of a conviction vote.

The reason they say they would like it to happen thus cleanly is that it would spare the nation the trauma of so cataclysmic a process as impeachment. The true reason is that Congress hasn't the guts to do its job.

I'm not opposed to having it happen more or less painlessly (although I suspect too many of us would miss the import of what the Nixon administration has done to the American system if he simply resigned and went away). But suppose there is no new bombshell. Suppose the President has the good sense or the good luck to get by without firing anybody else, without triggering another major "firestorm."

Suppose the most damning criminal evidence against Mr. Nixon personally

was contained in the two tapes that are missing and the 18-minute gap in the third. Does that mean that he will be or should be exonerated?

How have we arrived at a situation that makes it necessary for a suspect to convict himself before anyone will take steps to indict him, let alone try him in court?

The simplest answer is: lack of guts and lack of leadership.

Because there is no leadership in the House of Representatives, individual members arrive at their moral judgments by reading the polls, or perhaps the mail from home. They don't like to acknowledge that they are abdicating their responsibility, so they play at doing what they should.

A good example is the current "inquiry" of the House Judiciary Committee, which is considering whether the accusations against the President are of sufficient seriousness and validity to warrant sending a bill of impeachment to the House floor. Technically, that is a reasonable thing to do. In practice, it constitutes a holding action, a posture that says the House is doing its duty.

If the public pressure for impeachment increases dramatically, the committee will say, well yes, there are serious charges that ought to be weighed in an impeachment proceeding. If nothing startling happens for a while, and the public pressure shows signs of abating, the committee may say just the opposite.

It is reasonable for the House, or for Chairman Peter Rodino's Judiciary Committee, not to want to rush headlong into impeachment. But it is also reasonable, and accurate, to say that enough already is known—much of it already verified—to warrant the impeachment of Richard Nixon.

I won't bother listing the so-called impeachable offenses again. Everybody has his own favorite list, anyway, from George Meany to the American Civil Liberties Union. The point of all the lists is this: Richard M. Nixon, whose administration has been the most corrupt in the nation's history and whose continued administration as President could do irreversible damage to the nation's most sacred institution, must be removed from office.

Incidentally, anybody who still needs a list could do a lot worse than getting the December issue of the Progressive magazine or sending for reprints of the lead editorial (\$1 for 10 copies, 408 West Gorham St., Madison, Wis. 53703).

Progressive's editors ordered the reprints *in advance of publication* for much the same reason that the American Civil Liberties Union is distributing its Impeachment Handbook:

They have despaired of the Congress showing the courage and leadership to do what must be done, unless it is forced to do so through a groundswell of public action. And to that end, they are supplying the people with the tools to lead their leaders.