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## Forecasting a Bitter Spring

In the present poisonous political situation, it is worth thinking about how things will pretty surely be next April, if President Nixon does not resign in the interval. The reader should be warned in advance, however, that peering into the probable future makes the poisonous present seem downright cozy.

To begin with, the winter months can be counted on to bring the country a heavy diet of bad news. At the moment, for instance, the North Vietnamese have more troops in South Vietnam—at least 190,000—than they sent south for their last big offensive. They also have a new roadnet that would please General Motors; plus no less than 600 tanks; plus four jet airfields from which their MIG-17s and MIG-21s can challenge the Southerners' former air supremacy.

A great winter offensive by Hanoi must therefore be considered highly possible. The South Vietnamese government would have a good chance of repelling the offensive, if it were not for two things. The people in Congress who positively hanker for an American defeat in Vietnam have tied the President's hands in every possible military way. And they have further made it extremely difficult for the United States to help the South Vietnamese to help themselves.

The American people, nonetheless, are unlikely to enjoy the hard fact of final defeat in a war that has cost so much. If defeat comes, therefore, it will surely add to the political air pollution from which we are now suffering. But it will not add nearly as much as the energy crisis.

On that front, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has about an even chance of achieving another miracle. If it comes, the miracle will be the Arab oil tap being turned on again fairly soon after Arab-Israeli negotiations finally begin. But this cannot happen nearly soon enough to have much effect this winter in the long list of states where the energy shortage is just now becoming really acute.

Many job losses, and many, many exceedingly cold houses and automobiles without fuel cannot be expected to cause good temper among the voters.

By next April, therefore, the anger and disenchantment in the country are likely to be deeper and more bitter than they are today. Next April is here chosen as a key moment for a highly practical reason. The chairman of the

House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Peter Rodino of New Jersey, has promised a report to the House on the President's impeachment "by the early spring."

If Rodino meets this deadline, it will be surprising. Yet April is at least the first time the President has to think about, when he calculates, how the House will vote on a bill of impeachment. In making that calculation, moreover, he has some other factors to weigh.

As of now, for instance, the Louis Harris poll shows 59 per cent of voters inclining toward Democrats for Congress and 16 per cent inclining toward Republicans. The imbalance in favor of the Democrats constitutes a polling record.

This gives you an idea of the kind of thing members of Congress are going to learn at the grass-roots during the month's recess.

The Republican senators and representatives, particularly, will not respond amiably to the prospect of being decimated in the off-year election. They will note, too, that both the House and Senate Republican campaign committees are now rather uniformly giving the best chances of reelection to Republicans who have often opposed the President.

In these circumstances, President Nixon has to expect a surprising proportion of House Republicans to absent themselves when a bill of impeachment is finally voted up or down—or even to turn up on the floor to vote against him. Finally, the President may need to consider another factor, as yet hidden, that can have great significance.

The always-influential chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Rep. Wilbur Mills of Arkansas, is in fact playing with a remarkable new idea. It is nothing less than a bill of joint resolution that would free the President of any threat of prosecution or other court proceedings, if he decides to resign. It will not be an easy thing to do, but if Mills gets behind it, the thing may well be done.

Think, then, of that calculation the President will surely have to make next spring, if he continues to refuse to resign until that date. No such calculation by any President is ever perfectly predictable, but at least it is unwise to go on parroting the current cliché that "Nixon will never resign."