

Restraining Our Tacky Banana

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

An entity calling itself the National Campaign To Impeach Nixon has opened offices here. It is promising a variety of activities throughout the winter including a series of February "impeach-ins," although it is hard to believe that there can be anybody left who isn't familiar with the major elements of the case against the President.

The time for impeachment is past, however. It may come again if President Truthful is unable to resist his grosser criminal tendencies, but the best chance to get him out of there was lost when Congress confirmed Gerald Ford's appointment to the vice presidency. That act having been done, actual impeachment and conviction or Richard Nixon's forced resignation would bring

us to our bicentennial with the first President in our history elected by nobody.

The constitutional amendment under which Ford got his new job was not ratified with anything like the present situation in mind. It was passed as a means of taking care of the succession in the event of a double tragedy like a coronary and an assassination. Nobody foresaw the possibility that both the President and the Vice President would be driven from office as a pair of contemptible scoundrels.

Had death or physical incapacity carried off Spiro Agnew and Richard Nixon we could accept Ford as a third affliction, but one that does not break our tradition of having the whole citizenry elect our Presidents. However, if Richard Nixon is forced out, we will have these two deposed officeholders running around the

Republic Tendencies

Poster

country saying that the results of the 1972 election were reversed by a conspiracy of congressional cabalists and media malevolents.

Our defrocked Vice President is already piping that tune. Thief, crook, chiseler and bum that he may be, the man depicts himself as a martyr and a lot of people believe him. A lot more will believe a Nixon in the same situation.

We could have tolerated 30 or 40 per cent of the population thinking the President was robbed of his office if he were succeeded by a Vice President elected in the traditional manner. That is no longer possible so that what we would be doing now by giving Richard Nixon the boot is to tell a lot of people it's okay to defenestrate a Chief Executive and replace him with the nominee of some junta. In the minds of many

there will be precious little difference between that and the way the Greeks select their military dictators. Do we want to break 200 years of self-restraint and tradition to set such a menacing precedent?

If, after Agnew went, we wanted to kick Richard Nixon out, what we should have done was to pass a quickie constitutional amendment for a special election to fill out the unexpired portion of the term. Such an amendment could never have gotten ratified, which is another way of saying that, bad as Richard Nixon may be, the sentiment in favor of decapitation still isn't large enough to go ahead and commit the deed.

Hounding him from office, that is resignation, is more possible if only because a lot of conservative Republicans now want to dump him to save their own hides.

See COMMENTARY, D12, Col. 1

First Republic: Banana Republic?

COMMENTARY, From D1

Unfortunately, if they do get him out of there, it will be the anti-Nixon people who get the blame. In fact, you can expect that the same conservatives who will have worked to pressure him into an early San Clemente retirement will immediately turn around and accuse the rest of us of regicide.

Again, people will listen to them, for once Richard Nixon is banished, many who wanted to see him go will feel guilty enough about doing in the national father figure to look around for someone to blame. No, if the Republicans want to get rid of their liability, they should do it in the open and accept the consequences.

Politically, getting rid of Richard Nixon is a terrible mistake. His presence in the White House is a spur to the Congress to find its manhood (with apologies to the women members for this figure of speech). Moreover, Richard Nixon is so disorganized and defensive he is

giving some ground on issues that he otherwise would hold firm on.

Ford, on the other hand, would not have to be so accommodating. He would enjoy an extended period of oppositional paralysis because you've got to give a new man a chance and the rest of the traditional baloney. In the meantime, he would serve the same interests Richard Nixon does. It is those interests who now want Richard Nixon out because he botched the job.

Nevertheless, the hatred many bear is so ferocious they'll take these risks and disadvantages to chase him off in disgrace. They don't appreciate how fine and ironic a punishment it is to keep Mr. Truthful serving his sentence in the White House jail. Think of it.

Here is a guy who has cheated, lied, doublecrossed and double-dealt a whole lifetime to get and keep this job which is now a daily humiliation to him as one by one he must confess and explain each villainy and theft while the world laughs as it studies his tax returns.

© 1973 The Washington Post/King Features Syndicate