

ACLU Head Talks to Conservatives

Impeachment Barbs Traded

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

Impeachment had its lighter moments yesterday when the director of the American Civil Liberties Union tried to persuade a conservative luncheon club to play a leadership role in ousting the President.

Charles Morgan, introduced to the group as "one of the most intellectually honest former municipal bail attorneys," made only one concession to Mr. Nixon. He said he didn't want him to go to jail because he didn't think it could reform him.

Otherwise there was no quarter asked, and little given to anyone in Morgan's biting presentation of the impeachment case against the President over a luncheon of gravy-covered hamburger steak and mashed potatoes. Among his sallies that drew laughter:

"Apparently, Mr. Scott, Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon are now engaged in covering 'up evidence of innocence. That's a ground for impeachment that never occurred to me."

"The President wanted judge Stennis to hear the tapes . . . I didn't know Judge Stennis was deaf."

"The Washington Post will come out for impeachment 2½ weeks after it occurs."

Morgan also suggested that the country should observe Mr. Nixon's low payment of federal income taxes by staging a "793 Day" on April 15.

"We send \$793 to the Internal Revenue Service and all of our books and records to (Rep.) Wilbur Mills," he explained.

Beneath the banter, Morgan argued seriously that conservatives should rally around the flag of impeachment because President Nixon has violated "the root of conservative doctrine."

This doctrine, said Morgan, values the rule of law and holds that an individual has personal responsibility for his actions. The founding fathers, he said, made clear that they thought that a President is responsible for the actions of his subordinates. Morgan said Mr. Nixon also has "indicted himself" by his admissions about approving an illegal surveillance plan and a "special police" in the White House.

It is conservatives who should insist that the President take responsibility for these actions, said Morgan. Liberals, he added, should be philosophically capable of saying "maybe he was raised wrong."

Many in the audience applauded Morgan, a former Southern civil rights attorney and a onetime confessed conservative. But the ACLU director also was sharply challenged for the purported "double standard" of his organization.

Otto Otepka, the former

State Department security chief, said the ACLU position depends on "whose ox is gored." The ACLU, he said, had done nothing about "burglary . . . tapping telephones and lying under oath in the Kennedy administration."

The ACLU, said Allan Ryskind of Human Events, employs "a double standard beyond belief" in seeking to prosecute President Nixon when its purpose is to defend civil liberties.

Morgan said the ACLU has a duty to favor impeachment. He said the organization has intervened in behalf of the civil liberties of people when they were violated by a policeman or a judge and couldn't overlook Mr. Nixon's violations just because he is "the big kid on the block."

At the core of Morgan's impeachment fervor was an expression that the President is "the style-setter" for America and that the entire political process will be corrupted if he is not brought to trial.

"If Mr. Nixon is not impeached on the face of the evidence no one ever will be," Morgan said.

The ACLU director was introduced by his onetime roommate at the University of Alabama, conservative columnist Victor Gold. In their Alabama days, said Gold, he had been a liberal Democrat and Morgan a conservative who espoused the principles of Robert Taft.

"My intellectual progress has been in inverse proportion to Chuck's retrogression," Gold said. He praised Morgan for intellectual honesty and quipped: "I don't know whether he's ahead of his time or behind his time but I know he's not on schedule."

The luncheon group was chaired by Robert Kephart, publisher of Human Events, in the absence of conservative Lee Edwards. Kephart said that when Edwards learned the identity of the luncheon guest he had "succumbed to the urge to fly to Taipei."