

WXPPost

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Mr. Nixon's Deepening Troubles

Sometimes changes in political situations resemble the changes that time slowly wreaks upon the human face and figure. In other words, such changes can occur so gradually that you hardly perceive them if you are continuously on the spot. But if you go away for a while, you are shocked by what you find when you come back.

Certainly it is fairly shocking to see what seems to have happened to the President's situation during the past fortnight. In a nutshell, the betting a short two weeks ago was still against the House of Representatives voting a bill of impeachment. But today, it is a reasonable bet that a bill of impeachment will be voted and sent to the Senate.

There are all sorts of signs of this, hidden and open, little and big. For instance, a big sign, thus far hidden, is the fact that one of the chosen leaders of the House Republicans, Rep. John Anderson of Illinois, is letting friends know he is about to transmit the gravest possible warning to the White House.

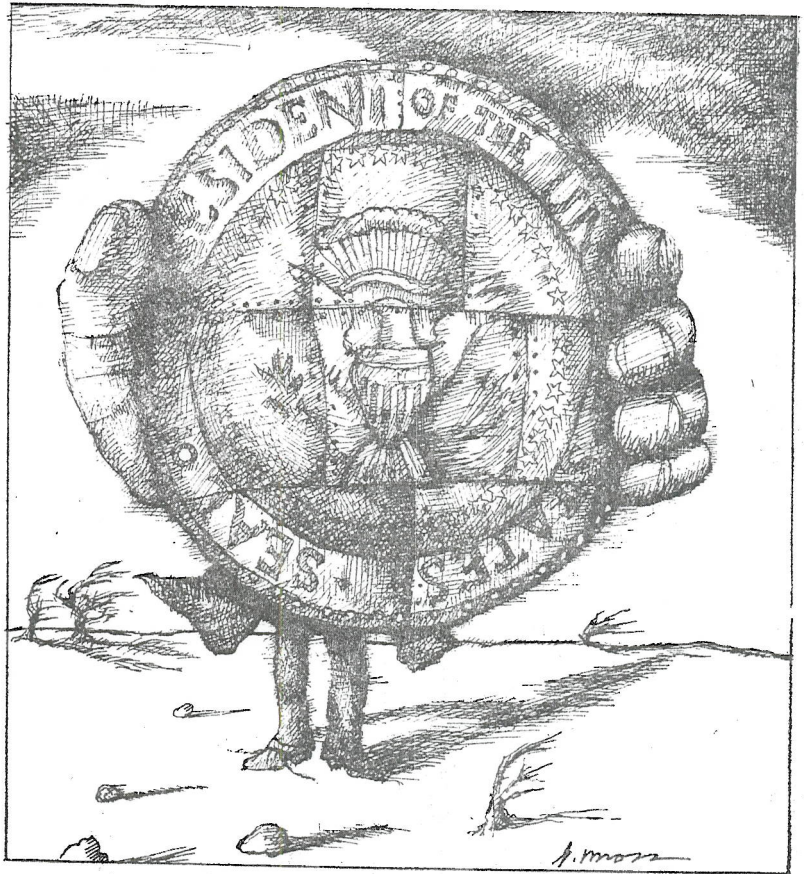
The warning will be that the President must instruct his lawyer, James D. St. Clair, to cease withholding much of the material that the House Judiciary Committee has asked for. Otherwise, Rep. Anderson will predict, many Republicans may feel entitled to vote for a bill of impeachment, on the simple ground that the Judiciary Committee has been improperly obstructed.

Rep. Anderson will not exactly spell it all out in plain words. But it should be obvious that when he predicts many Republicans may feel entitled to vote for a bill of impeachment, he must himself be included in this group. And when you find the chairman of the House Republican Conference quite visibly growing less and less certain about his own impeachment vote, you have to conclude the President has been getting into deeper and deeper trouble.

The basic nature of the President's trouble is simple enough. Support for him that formerly seemed reliable has begun to get uncomfortably shaky, and even threatens to erode altogether. Consider, for instance, the moderate-to-liberal Republicans for whom Rep. Anderson mainly speaks.

Among Republicans of this stripe, there was never any strong personal attachment to Richard M. Nixon. Until quite recently, however, these Republicans felt themselves somewhat regretably yet inescapably attached to the President in quite another way. They greatly feared the vengeance of the Nixon loyalists in their constituencies, in fact; and they were therefore planning a straight party-line vote on impeachment.

Still deeper fears have now been aroused, however, by the recent series of special elections to traditionally Republican House seats. As everyone has already remarked, the outcome of these special elections prophesied a general Republican massacre next November. Hence the moderate-to-liberal Republicans do not worry so much, any more, about the vengeance of Nix-



on loyalists simply because they are now so intensely worried about the general attitude of the voters back home.

For the most practical political reasons, in short, matters like the tug-of-war between the House Judiciary Committee and the White House staff and lawyers are beginning to be examined in a new light. Remember, to begin with, that the White House has already given the Judiciary Committee access to an enormous mass of formerly confidential material.

Anyone can see that in a different climate, the Judiciary Committee's demands for still another enormous mass of confidential material would have met with a quite different congressional response. There would have been cries of "drag net." The position thus far taken by the White House would have won much active support.

Instead, no single Republican voice has yet been raised in support of the

White House. Rep. Anderson's impending warning to the White House also reflects a widespread view, not restricted to Republicans; for it is common among the more conservative Democrats who used to hate the whole idea of impeachment.

This view does not mean, of course, that large numbers of House members are sincerely indignant about the President's "defiance" of the Judiciary Committee. It means, rather, that a lot of House members who quite recently were mainly thinking about how to explain votes against a bill of impeachment, are now letting their thoughts run upon a very different subject. That subject is the best pretext to cite for a pro-impeachment vote.

Such, then, are the reasons a House majority for a bill of impeachment has begun to be a reasonable bet. Meanwhile, however, there still seems to be no possibility of the needed two-thirds of the Senate to vote against the President.

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