

Sen. Buckley's 'Lapse' and Mr. Nixon's Strategy

I would rejoice were Congress composed of 535 James Buckleys. But his call for Mr. Nixon's resignation is a rare lapse from perfection. It radiates distrust of the *wrong* people. And it will serve Mr. Nixon's strategy for surviving his forthcoming Senate impeachment trial.

Mr. Nixon's strategy is to entold so many conservatives in his killing embrace that he can prevent a two-thirds vote for conviction. To do this he must nurture the notion that he is in trouble not because he surrounded himself with knaves but because cynics want to reverse the 1972 election.

In his call for resignation Mr. Buckley is scrupulously agnostic regarding Mr. Nixon's comportment. But he distrusts the ability of Congress and the American people to cope with impeachment. And he flays "those in and out of the media" who have exploited Watergate to "subvert the mandate of the 1972 election."

And backward reels the mind, back to last April 30. John Ehrlichman said he was resigning because of "repeated rumors, unfounded charges or implications and whatever else the media carries." Mr. Nixon said of Mr. Ehrlich-

man and H. R. Haldeman: they are magnificent chaps but they must go because for some reason you, the public, do not understand that. Now Mr. Buckley says to Mr. Nixon: you are public spirited but you must go because for some reason the public finds you a traumatic experience.

Mr. Buckley asks Mr. Nixon to make a "magnanimous act" of "statesmanship"—resignation. But if a man of Mr. Buckley's known reasonableness and civility takes the line he does about Mr. Nixon's troubles, imagine the line Mr. Nixon would take in resigning.

Frankly, I do not think Mr. Buckley's statement represents his full and final thinking about Mr. Nixon. I think he believes he must talk very delicately to the national conservative constituency that wisely looks to him for leadership. But for once Mr. Buckley is underestimating the fortitude of conservatives.

Most conservatives faced the gloomy facts about Mr. Nixon long ago and withdrew their support. The 27 percent of the population that "approves" of Mr. Nixon's conduct of office is not a conservative bloc. It is largely an inattentive bloc of people who support

Presidents, no matter who, no matter what.

And now Mr. Nixon having quickly and predictably rejected Mr. Buckley's resignation advice, will use Mr. Buckley's rhetoric to reinforce the bitter bewilderment of the 27 per cent.

Mr. Buckley says, correctly, that a Senate decision to remove Mr. Nixon "would leave a sizeable, embittered, stubborn minority convinced that the media had hounded Richard Nixon out of office in order to upset the mandate of the 1972 vote and subvert what it believes to be the foundations of the republic."

And *where* might this embittered minority get *that idea*? From Mr. Nixon—and from Mr. Buckley's statement about people using "slanderous gossip" and other "devices" to subvert the 1972 mandate; about senators using the impeachment trial as a "20th Century Roman Coliseum" and pandering to the "passions" and "prurient interests" of the "electronic lions" (the audience); about a "runaway Congress" bent on doing "irreparable damage" to "the republic as he has known it."

Mr. Nixon will use Mr. Buckley, he will not heed him. And Congress and

the country will cope with impeachment. Congress has not become hysterical during Mr. Nixon's slow-motion harikari throughout the last year. And the people have not become volatile; they have calmly withdrawn their support from Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon's public support is like that yellow yo-yo he played with at the Grand Old Opry. Mr. Nixon threw the yo-yo down—and he could not get the damn thing back up. Soon even the catatonic bumblers around our somnambulist President, and he himself, will face the fact that the disgrace is permanent. There are not going to be any Richard M. Nixon high schools, parks, highways, stadiums.

If Mr. Nixon resigns it will not be for any of the high-minded, principled reasons Mr. Buckley advances. If he resigns it will be for precisely the reason his protegee, Spiro Agnew, resigned. He will talk, as Mr. Agnew talked, about sparing the nation a disagreeable experience, etc., but he will act, as Mr. Agnew acted, to spare himself a disagreeable collision with due legal process.

If Mr. Nixon resigns it will be because that is the easy thing to do.