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The Peril of the Press

To the Editor:

While the impeachment inquiry in Congress with its corollary assumption of Presidential guilt continues to capture the public interest, a new and far greater danger to our democratic system appears to have surfaced.

In point of fact, the progressive disintegration of support President Nixon enjoyed with the press and electronic news media during the 1972 campaign presages an ominous trend in American politics.

Assuming President Nixon's political career has been irremediably damaged by the overfocus on Watergate and other alleged acts of malfeasance, the power of the news media will emerge so awesome as to render the political apparatus in this country dangerously dependent.

Most Americans remain convinced of the probity of the press. Unfortunately this can now be said to represent a case of misplaced confidence.

Owing primarily to President Nixon's policy of minimal exposure to press and TV coverage during his second term in office, he has experienced a serious decline in popularity with the press corps. Moreover, the President appears to have aroused unendurable pique among the membership. As a consequence and contrary to certain basic concepts of American justice, a man has been subjected to trial by innuendo and conviction by allegation largely through the efforts of this slighted and vengeful faction.

Aside from the peril inherent in this novel acquisition of power by the news media, it is most profoundly to be deplored that any President of the United States should be subject to criminal sanctions for the actions of subordinates who, in response to a perfectly legitimate Presidential directive, act in a manner contrary to Presidential intent and outside the perimeter of the law.

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Forest Hills, N. Y., March 24, 1974