

# Letters to the Editor

## NYTimes Presidency: An American Dilemma APR 20 1974

To the Editor:

So often now many of us wonder how continued support by some sections of conservative opinion for President Nixon is possible. Anthony Lewis raised the question in a recent column and expressed surprise that *The Wall Street Journal* could seemingly so minimize Mr. Nixon's machinations in the preparation of his tax returns.

But a similar attitude is amazingly widespread throughout the nation. People may be deeply disturbed by the President's apparent behavior and yet become troubled or even annoyed if urged to support his impeachment. Why is this? I think that such reactions are natural, indeed almost inevitable, largely because of two conditioning factors not often expressed and even more rarely seen as interacting on each other.

The first is a latent tendency to accept authority, a tendency present even in a "free society." Based on a belief that there must be "those who know," it derives from sources as deeply buried as is religious belief. It can and perhaps more often than not does influence those who are "true believers" in the religious sense. But it can also play a part among those skeptical of the supernatural.

It represents an anchor of supposed constancy in a world changing so rapidly as to defy comprehension. That anchor is the Presidency rather than the man who occupies that office. But confusion between the two is extensive and easily exploitable, and no one understands this better than Richard Nixon.

The second factor that induces support for Mr. Nixon even among those who certainly consider themselves moral men and women is more com-

plicated. It stems from a troubled feeling, inchoate yet compelling, that the continuance of Mr. Nixon's leadership is somehow more compatible with our basic economic and social mores than its termination. This may very well be a comment on the "morality" of those mores. Even so, the resulting compulsion persists.

Whether or not the President is guilty of provable connivance with the giant enterprises that control the American economy, he is clearly tolerant of their practices and profits. Were he to be ousted, they might well be subjected to closer and less friendly scrutiny.

The underlying, if often unrealized, feeling that this would be the case may play a decisive part in the unwillingness of many decent citizens to call for Mr. Nixon's impeachment though they may deplore much that he has done or is suspected of doing.

Furthermore, they may fear, and not only the powerful among them, an ultimate trend toward a "socialized state" if the present system of governmental-industrial-military supremacy should be seriously undermined by Mr. Nixon's downfall. Whether or not a better system would supplant it is by no means an idle question.

Nevertheless, the interaction of these two compelling factors obscures what should be the clear need for purging our Government of a President whose continuance in office offers a far more serious eventual threat to all those values which have sustained us, in the name of which he dares to speak and the nature of which he constantly betrays.

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