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The Ruin of the President

The Republican leaders of both House and Senate are quietly letting it be known they are far from sure that they will be able to refrain from voting for the President's impeachment and conviction in the end.

The foregoing is additional to the outspoken denunciation of the White House tapes by Sen. Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania as altogether repulsive and disgusting; and to the forthright suggestion that the President ought to consider early resignation by Representative John Rhodes of Arizona. If signs in politics mean anything at all, these are surely signs that portend the President's ruin.

In the short space of a week, in fact, the reversal of the trend on Capitol Hill has been another cruel development for Richard M. Nixon. At first, leading Democrats as well as Republicans thought the release of the tape-transcripts would be helpful to the President.

All agreed in private with the pointedly public remarks of Senator Scott about the tapes' exceedingly unpleasant character. But the general reaction was, at first, that repulsiveness was not an impeachable offense; that there was no solid evidence of presidential criminality; and that no President ought to be impeached except for proven crimes.

This first congressional reaction antedated the public reaction, however. As the week wore on, the solid citizens in the states and congressional districts made their feelings known with vehemence. Normally, these are the non-letter writers; the holders of key jobs in business and banking; the ones senators and representatives seriously worry about. Their main feeling was that the President ought to leave the White House.

This was how the strange flavor of the tapes affected them, as it also affected the editors of conservative newspapers like the Chicago Tribune. So you now have a situation which must justly infuriate President Nixon—a situation in which congressional leaders shake their heads over "those awful tapes," when the same congressional leaders were urging the release of the tapes only a fortnight ago.

Yet the rights and wrongs of congressional advice are of trifling importance, compared to some other matters the President now needs to consider. To begin with, he needs to consider—in fact, to do his best to find out—whether he is really faced with the kind of torrents-of-spring washout in

his hoped-for support that the signs seem to portend.

The White House loyalists are undoubtedly right when they tell the world, as they also tell the President, that many senators and congressmen would like to see him resign "because they're damn well afraid of having to vote." There is no doubt that the oncoming votes for or against impeachment and for or against conviction are deeply feared in the House and Senate.

It is highly questionable, however, whether the White House loyalists are also right in asserting, and again, telling the President, that his main support is holding firm in the House and Senate. In view of the signs to the contrary, it would almost be against nature if this were true. Later, of course,

there may be another change of trend more favorable to the President, but where this might arise, God alone knows.

Meanwhile, the President also needs to consider another point of immense importance to himself and the country. In brief, there is no rule about double jeopardy in impeachment proceedings. President Andrew Johnson's impeachment was in fact moved twice in the House, and only won a House majority the second time.

You can see why this is a vital matter, if you think of the Democratic victors in the recent special elections that were so full of dire auguries for the Republicans. All these new Democratic members strutted into Washington, declaring that they had a "mandate"

from their people to oust the President from office.

If the President is still in the White House in October-November, he will be the central issue, not in a mere handful of special elections, but in almost every congressional and Senate election. It is an odds-on bet that the result will be a Republican catastrophe. If this is the result, next year's far more heavily Democratic Congress will quite certainly revive the impeachment matter, come hell or high water.

In short, there is no longer any way for the President to silence the Watergate clamor. There is a strong likelihood of impeachment and conviction this year. And if not this year, the whole thing will begin again next year. It is a dreadful prospect.

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