

Joseph Alsop WXPost

MAY 29 1974

The Impeachment Timetable

The uncalculated horror of what lies ahead, unless President Nixon resigns voluntarily, is finally beginning to be honestly admitted. The chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Peter Rodino, is still saying that the committee is "shooting at" mid-July for its report to the House on the President's impeachment.

Other senior committee members are more realistically talking about a report to the House in August, and the possibility of an over-spill into September is being admitted by some. Brief calculation is enough to show how long the Watergate-mania, and worse still, the paralysis induced by the Watergate-mania, are therefore going to afflict the entire U.S. government.

Assume a report by the Judiciary Committee to the full House of Representatives by mid-August—which is optimistic! That means the House will have voted the bill of impeachment up or down no sooner than the end of August.

Assume the bill of impeachment is voted. That means the Senate in its usual disarray, will finally begin to tackle the President's trial no sooner than just after the Labor Day weekend. Sen. Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) has hopefully predicted that the Senate will then be able to complete the President's trial within two months. If Senator Mansfield is correct, the President will then be declared innocent or removed from office no earlier than the very eve of election day in November.

As the world knows, however, Mike Mansfield is a man far better fitted for a career in sainthood than a career as Senate majority leader. A Senate under his leadership will in fact require the kind of Divine intervention that saints are said to be able to call forth, in order to finish the President's trial in two months. It is far more likely that the government's Watergate-induced paralysis will last until Christmas or the New Year.

Nor is that the end of the grisly story. Just make the opposite assumptions. Suppose the present House fails

to vote a bill of impeachment by a small majority. Or suppose the Senate refuses to convict the President by one or two votes. These are still clear possibilities—particularly the latter—although a bad outcome for the President grows more likely day by day.

On present prospects, the November election should produce a perfect massacre of Republicans in Congress. The House minority leader, Rep. John Rhodes (R-Ariz.), has been known to talk in his gloomier moments of a Republican contingent in the House reduced to a hundred members or even fewer.

Furthermore, every new Democrat in the next Congress will arrive in Washington looking for a headline with a grandiloquent statement about his "mandate" to drive Richard M. Nixon from the White House. If the President has just had a narrow escape—which is the most one can imagine—can anyone believe that a renewed attempt to impeach and convict will not be made in the kind of new Congress that all but certainly impends?

It has to be remembered that the radical Republicans made two onslaughts upon President Andrew Johnson. The first one failed. The bill of impeachment was only voted on the second try. His conviction failed in the Senate by a single vote. But President Johnson did not have to think of facing an even more hostile Congress for another two years, after he so narrowly escaped conviction.

There are in truth two sides to this undiluted horror that stretches out ahead for such an interminable period. The least of it is to have Watergate and all it stands for the sole topic of the political community in Washington. You can now count on the fingers of one hand the leaders of government, like Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger, who retain the power to talk about and think about anything else but Watergate and all it stands for.

The worst of the horror is the paralysis that this obsession inevitably



By Conrad for the Los Angeles Times

produces, and all the really fearful dangers which that paralysis inevitably causes. The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, Dr. Arthur Burns, has just correctly pointed out that inflation has now become a danger to the U.S. political system. But what is really being done about inflation, or the energy problem, or about anything else, in fact?

The answer is "Zero," and in Congress as well as the Executive Branch. Add that all America's friends overseas are profoundly imperilled by this spectacle of a U.S. government in the state of a beached whale. Altogether, if the undiluted horror does not lead to far greater disasters, it will be proof this country is in God's own care.

© 1974, Los Angeles Times