

Don't Impeach The President --Censure Him

THE TIME is ripe to put on the table a rather different proposal for dealing with the problem of President Nixon: Don't impeach him — censure him.

I think that many reasonable people would agree that what Mr. Nixon really deserves, and what would in the long run best serve the interests of the Republic, is not his impeachment and removal from office but his formal censure by a solemn Joint Resolution of both Houses of Congress.



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Let me stress that I am not recommending censure as an alternative — and lighter — form of punishment if Mr. Nixon has in fact been guilty of "Treason, Bribery, or other High Crimes and Misdemeanors." If the Senate so finds, then he ought to be removed as the Constitution prescribes.

But anyone who has studied the mass of data involved in Watergate (etc.) with reasonable objectivity, or better yet with a modicum of legal training, knows that the job of nailing Mr. Nixon personally with a sufficiently serious indictable offense is not proving all that easy.

And it must be an indictable offense; it would be a tragedy for the nation to remove a president for the first time in its history for some obscure wrong, tortuously pieced together out of snippets of conversations in the Oval Office.

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ON THE other hand, it would take a relentless Nixon enthusiast indeed to argue that this man has not richly earned a formal resolution of censure.

At a very minimum, he permitted his management of the Executive Office and his own re-election campaign committee to get so far out of hand that many high officials of both have already been convicted of various crimes.

To overlook maladministration on such a scale, or to be satisfied with Mr. Nixon's assertion that he "takes responsibility" in some vague way for his aides' misdeeds, would be an absurdly inadequate response.

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JUST WHILE all this was going on, however, the President was scoring some of his most stunning foreign policy successes. The disengagement of our ground troops in Vietnam, the return of our prisoners of war, the cease-fire and disengagement obtained between the Arab and Israeli forces in the Middle East, the new American ascendancy over the Soviet Union in the Arab world: these are very considerable achievements that have been both noted and appreciated by the American people.

The fact that they were also largely the personal achievements of Henry Kissinger ought not tempt us to forget who put Kissinger where he is and gave him the steady backing he needed.

That is perhaps the chief reason why I think the American people — barring, of course, the zealots on both sides — would welcome a resolution of censure. Impeachment and removal, simply as a convulsive reaction to Watergate, throws out the baby with the bath. Censure would enable the condemnation of Mr. Nixon to fall precisely where it belongs.

Properly drawn, moreover, it could have the effect of a more general shot across the bows of the overweening presidency, which ever since FDR has grown and grown until it threatened to consume us all.

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MR. NIXON would, I think, in responding to the motion of censure, have the good sense to accept it meekly. Could he finish out his term with reasonable efficiency? I don't see why not.

His moral authority would be somewhat diminished — but it is diminished already, and it cannot possibly make much of a comeback even if he successfully staves off the effort to impeach and remove him — as he well may.

Don't impeach the man — censure him. That's the answer.