

Nixon 'Is About To Be Impeached'



James Kilpatrick

A MELANCHOLY TIME is approaching for the many Americans who have tended generally to support Richard Nixon. I count myself among them. Our President is about to be impeached.

The President will be impeached by the House of Representatives on three broad grounds. They will boil down to these charges: the abuse of power, the abuse of justice, and the abuse of money.

The quest for future evidence, in the form of additional tapes or documents, has now become meaningless. The Judiciary Committee and the whole House have sufficient evidence to weigh a vote to impeach. This is not to say that the evidence is sufficient for two-thirds of the Senate to convict. Such a judgment will have to wait upon trial.

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I VENTURE these predictions out of emotions I cannot sort out: sorrow, shame, anger, pity, contempt, scorn, despair. I don't know. For the past week I have read little but House documents and Senate reports. Their cumulative effect, in my view, is devastating. This evidence is no mirage; it overwhelms.

For many months I have advanced the theory that an impeachable offense must be a criminal offense. The experts notwithstanding, I cling to that theory still. That is what the Constitution plainly says to me. But if that theory ever truly mattered, it matters little now. The Constitution is what the judges say it is, and an impeachable offense is what the House says it is.

Some of this damning evidence deals

with the President's abuse of money. He closed his eyes, or never opened them, to flagrant abuses in the raising of campaign funds. At San Clemente and at Key Biscayne he ventured no objection to the spending of public money for his personal pleasure. He looked the other way while his lawyers and accountants manipulated dates and documents to his tax advantage. He gave his wife diamond earrings — and paid for them with mystery money produced in a shell-game shuffle.

Other evidence — pages upon pages of evidence — deals with his abuse of justice. What hurts in this area is the President's attitude. His purpose was not to get the truth out; his purpose, revealed from his own mouth, was to keep the truth in.

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THE MOST damning evidence, in my own view, deals with the President's abuse of power. It is sickening — no other words comes to mind — to read of John Dean's slimy efforts to harass the President's "enemies" through the Internal Revenue Service. And Mr. Nixon knew what Dean was up to.

It is doubtless true, but it is surely immaterial, that other Presidents and other public figures have committed similar abuses. It is also true that much of this avalanche could melt away under the heat of cross-examination in the Senate. Impeachment, like indictment, is a one-sided process; the President has yet to make his case in full. In the end, he may be acquitted. But the mountains of evidence now before the House add up to a prima facie case of awful gravity.

Arthur Hoppe will be back on Monday.