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# The Crucible of Impeachment

From the crucible of impeachment there now emerges a new national consensus on the presidency. It combines Southern constitutionalism and the progressive idealism of the West with Eastern liberalism.

It puts into discard the imperial and military features of the presidency which grew so prominent in the course of the American rise to international preeminence. It reasserts the principle that legitimacy has to reach beyond personal success to rest on trust in the people and their surrogates in the Congress and the courts.

Perhaps the finest role in the impeachment process has been played by the South. Southerners are peculiarly disposed to the intense patriotism that goes with having once been a highly distinct part of the country. Southerners figure large in the armed forces and in the congressional committees devoted to the military. So the South has been especially prone to stand up and salute any President.

But four southern traditionalists on the House Judiciary Committee—Caldwell Butler, a Virginia Republican, and Democrats Walker Flowers, James Mann and Ray Thornton from Alabama, South Carolina and Arkansas, respectively—took their stands against Mr. Nixon. All four delivered notable statements, and Mr. Thornton made

what seemed to me the most penetrating analysis of the cover-up.

Mr. Mann brought a hush to the committee, the staff and the press when he asserted that he was prepared to go forward even without all the materials from the tapes. Mr. Flowers held out a hand to those in the press

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whom he had come to know during the impeachment hearings as "real people." He then set a standard for presidential responsibility which goes far beyond the familiar Southern weakness for a cozy relationship between the White House and senior legislators.

He said: "If the trust of the people in the word of the man to whom they have given their highest honor is betrayed, if the people cannot know that their President is candid and truthful with them, then the very basis of government is undermined."

Progressive idealism found expres-

sion in the remarks of such Democrats as Jerome Waldie and Don Edwards of California and Tom Rallsback and Harold Proelich, Republicans from Illinois and Wisconsin, respectively. All of them have been known as good government men. They have looked to the presidency, like many other progressives, as an agency for maintaining fairness and honesty.

So Mr. Rallsback nearly lost control as he recounted Mr. Nixon's use of the Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department. Mr. Waldie registered incredulity as he cited President Nixon disparaging the moral example set by President Eisenhower.

As to the Eastern liberals, they have been the President-lovers par excellence. Since the New Deal days, the minorities of the big cities have looked to the Presidents as their special defenders. Patrician figures, comprising the so-called Eastern Establishment, have also nailed their standards to the White House.

But John Conyers, the black Democrat from Detroit, made a point of resting his vote against the President on a stand usually dear to Southerners—the prerogatives of the Congress. Hamilton Fish Jr., the scion of a distinguished New York Republican family whose ancestors include a former Secretary of State, made a point of disa-

vowing privilege for a ruling class. "The rule of law," he said, "applies equally to those who govern as well as to the governed."

Finally, there was Chairman Peter Rodino of New Jersey, the product of a political machine which for years battled on the favor of Presidents. In his remarkable statement, Mr. Rodino cited the Patron saint of conservatism, Edmund Burke. He put in his own motion an eminently Burkean statement: "Our judgment is not concerned with constitutional government."

Even the President's chief defenders are not in conflict with the principle that binds his accusers. Charles Wiggins of California and David Dennis of Indiana, for example, based their cases on narrow legal grounds—on the lack of what Mr. Wiggins called "competent evidence" and not on disagreement with the principle of restricting presidential power.

So the impeachment rests on a philosophical harmony. The effort of the White House to divide the Congress and the country has failed. It is fit that impeachment comes on the heels of the unanimous Supreme Court decision to limit executive privilege. And the country now moves toward impeachment united as rarely before.