

Joseph Kraft

WXPost
Impeachment:

The morning after his slashing attack on the impeachment inquiry by the Judiciary Committee, the New Jersey Republican, Charles Sandman, rode on the subway with Lud Ashley, a Democratic congressman from Toledo. "Pretty rough stuff," Ashley murmured. Sandman shrugged, and said: "I was only trying to win over a couple of votes on our side."

That comment expresses exactly what the struggle inside the Judiciary committee has been all about. The fight has been between Republicans, and at issue is the future of the party. Judging by the relatively wary reaction of Vice President Gerald Ford and House Minority Leader John Rhodes, the Nixon wing of the party is not winning.

By all normal standards, the Republican interest is to unload Mr. Nixon with dispatch. The party would then be out from under the Watergate burden. It could line up behind Mr. Ford and be in good position to win in 1976. The more so as the party could claim that it had the strength to clean its own house.

Republican congressmen who have voted for impeachment in the Judiciary Committee have been advancing precisely those arguments. Thus Tom Railsback, the congressman from Illinois who has led the Republicans for impeachment in the committee, underlined the difference between the President and the party at a breakfast here the other day.

"The future of the Republican Party," he said, "doesn't lie with President Nixon. The future belongs to Republicans in the Senate, the House, and the state legislatures."

Caldwell Butler, the Virginia Republican who joined the impeachment forces in the committee, put the argument in the debate itself. In his opening statement he said:

"Watergate is our shame. These things happened in the Republican administration while we had a Republican in the White House and every single person convicted to date has one way or the other owed allegiance to the Republican Party. . . . It is we, not the Democrats, who must demonstrate that we are capable of enforcing the high standards we would set for them."

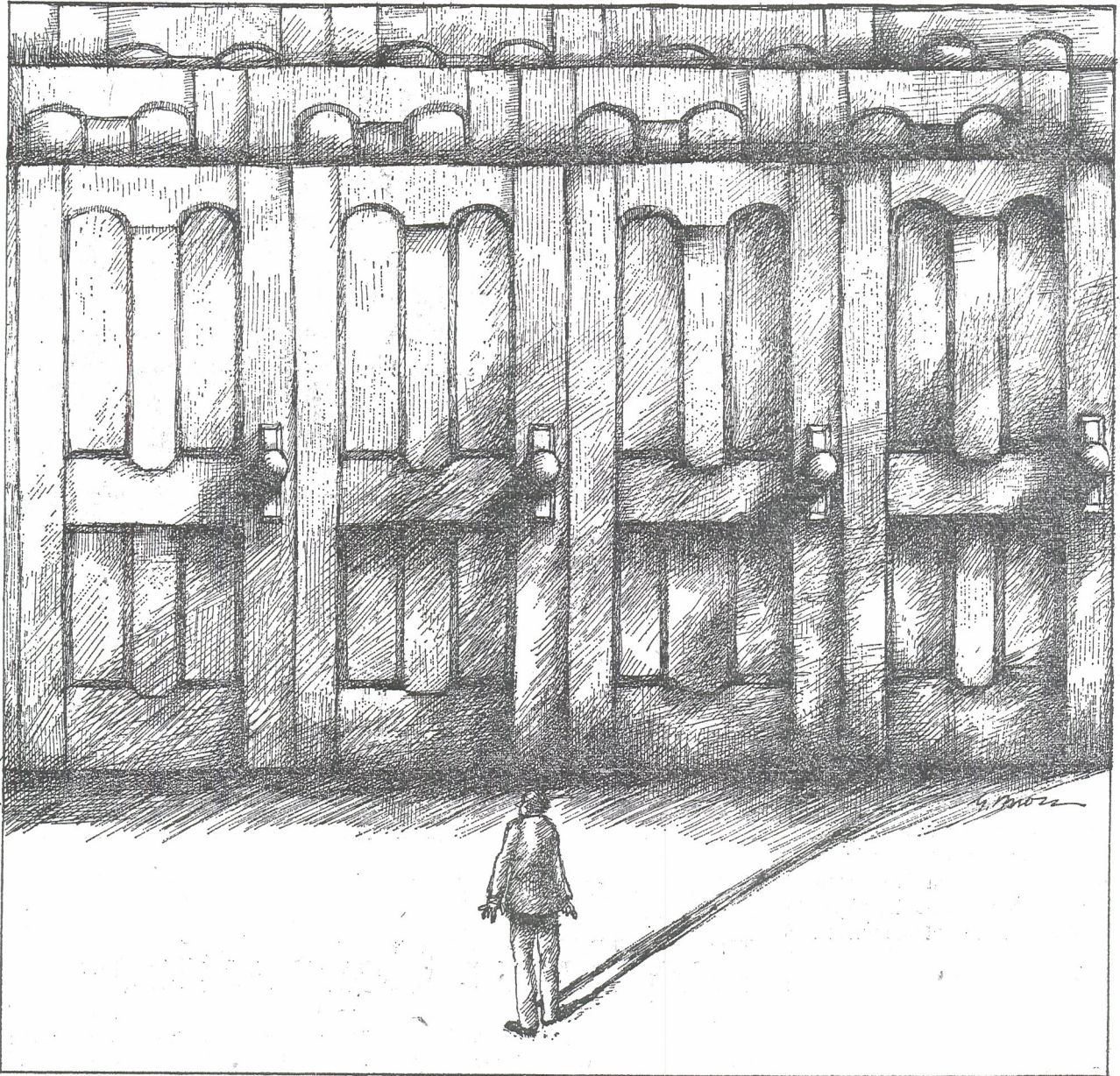
To bar the way to that seductive argument, the President has only one weapon. It is the weapon of fear—the threat that any Republican who deserts in this hour of need will be impaled on the glittering blade of retaliation.

In that vein, hard-core Nixon supporters around the country have been mobilized. They are deluging Republican members of the Congress with mail and telegrams threatening to take vengeance at the polls against Republicans who abandon the President.

Similarly, the White House itself has been quick to stigmatize the commit-

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The Republican Realignment...



By Geoffrey Moss

tee and individual Republicans. Thus when the direction of the committee became clear, Ron Ziegler called it a "kangaroo court." When Congressman Lawrence Hogan of Maryland became the first Republican to announce against the President, he drew withering fire from presidential counsellor Dean Burch.

Inside the Judiciary Committee, the Nixon loyalists have also been brandishing the threat of retaliation. The President's hard core supporters—Charles Wiggins of California, David Dennis of Indiana, Del Latta of Ohio and Mr. Sandman—have centered their charge on the argument that the Articles of Impeachment lack specificity and a direct link to the President himself.

That is a way of telling other Republicans that they will have to vote on a vague indictment, thus exposing themselves to punishment from Republican voters who need chapter and verse to be convinced of the President's culpability. As Mr. Wiggins asked:

"Wouldn't it be a damning indictment, Mr. Chairman, if this committee, if after all this time and all this money, we were unable to state with specificity what this case is all about?"

But the notable feature of the Nixon loyalists is that they come from conservative-cum-Wallaceite districts where Republicans do not have to woo the middle to win. Thus Mr. Latta won by 73 per cent in his last race, and Mr. Wiggins had 65 per cent of the vote. Messrs. Dennis and Sandman also

won comfortably, and in their districts George Wallace took 12 per cent of the vote in 1968.

Republicans obliged to win middle-of-the-road votes, particularly those at the head of the party, seem to be divorcing themselves from the hard-core Nixonites. Thus when House Minority Leader John Rhodes advises the President to take his case to the public in a television address, he is in effect saying: "I can't do it for you." Vice President Ford, while making noises friendly to the President, is clearly not throwing his vast congressional prestige into the battle. Mr. Ford plans to spend Aug. 8 through Aug. 19 — the critical days of the House debate—in California, Oregon, Washington state and Hawaii.

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