

The Agreed Articles...

Two years of this country's political anguish is distilled into some 1,450 solemn words that form the three articles of impeachment against the President of the United States. These three articles, now adopted by the Judiciary Committee, will go to the floor of the House of Representatives later this month.

As the viewing public across the land perceived night after night, every word of these documents has been scrutinized; dozens of "perfecting amendments" assigned commas, semicolons and conjunctions to their proper places. Obviously the whole story cannot be spelled out in detail in the actual indictment. But with the weight of volumes of evidence to back up the articles, they clearly establish—in the ponderous language of parliamentary practice—"wherefore, Richard M. Nixon, by such conduct, warrants impeachment and trial and removal from office." Only once before, across the two centuries of the American Republic, have charges of such magnitude been leveled.

• Obstruction of Justice

Article I charges the President with obstructing the administration of justice, in violation of the Constitution and oath of office. This is the so-called Watergate cover-up article. Through nine subclauses, it charts the pattern employed to thwart lawful investigation of the Watergate break-in, the false or misleading statements to investigators, the withholding of evidence and inducements to others for silence or false testimony.

Mr. Nixon is accused of "approving, condoning and acquiescing in the surreptitious payment" of money to influence or prevent testimony. In a sweeping charge, fully backed by the record, the President is also held to account for "making false or misleading public statements for the purpose of deceiving the people of the United States."

• Abuse of Power

Article II is a far broader indictment of President Nixon's style of governance. The President is accused of repeated "conduct violating the constitutional rights of citizens" and of contravening the law in abuse of Government agencies.

He is charged with attempts to pervert the nation's tax-collection system for his partisan political purposes and to punish enemies and reward friends of his Administration; and with the authorization of wiretapping and investigations "unrelated to national security, the enforcement of laws, or any other lawful function of his office." Even further, the President is charged with directing the concealment of official records of this surveillance.

Beyond the devious uses of lawful agencies, Mr. Nixon is held liable for maintaining a "secret investigative unit within the office of the President," financing these so-called "plumbers" in part with money drawn from political campaign contributions. He failed to "take care that the laws were faithfully executed," the language of the Constitution, when he did nothing on learning that his subordinates were impeding or frustrating lawful functions of the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

• Defying Congress

Article III is the shortest, simplest and possibly most fundamental accusation of all: Mr. Nixon willfully disobeyed subpoenas from the Congress, substituting his judgment for that of the constitutionally empowered investigators as to what evidence was necessary for an impeachment inquiry.