

The Calm Before the Storm

One senses here the calm before the storm. Mr. Nixon has made much of the crises in his life, and much of the fact that he has surmounted them by action. He must now be thinking that this is the greatest crisis of all. The question of what action he will take to meet it may be as important to the rest of us as it is to him.

It is not in Mr. Nixon's character to take no action. This present pose—the lonely arrival and departure from the airport, the silent holing up in the Oval Office, the patient bearing of the outrageous fortune—it cannot last. He will come out raging. The question is how.

Some people here think that resignation is for the first time being seriously considered as an "option," to use one of Mr. Nixon's favorite words.

They think the President misread his situation while he was in California and they cite the statements of presidential aides Ron Zeigler and Dean Burch as evidence for their view. Only a man who didn't quite understand how far the deliberative process had gone, they argue, could have permitted

"It is not in Mr. Nixon's character to take no action. He will come out raging. The question is how."

his aides to pose such epithets as "kangaroo court" and "hired gunmen" to the calm and gentle reasoning of the House Judiciary Committee.

Now that he is back in Washington, so say the believers in the resignation option, Mr. Nixon will understand readily that the impeachment process has gained momentum, that he has little chance to win in the House and that conviction in the Senate no longer seems improbable.

Up to now, the President's aides have been counting on Southern Democrats to join conservative Republicans in unimpeachable solidarity. But the vote in the House committee makes that outcome seem less sure. If the

certified conservative James Mann (D-S.C.) can come down eloquently on the side of impeachment, who is to be so sure that Sen. John Stennis (D-Miss.)—once he has similarly studied the record—won't come to the same conclusion?

Resignation, it is argued, would give Mr. Nixon some proof against obloquy—perhaps also against further revelations of misconduct—and a platform in retirement as one who had been wronged. It would also fit the President's character—he could go out flailing his critics for not believing in national security.

Those who predict resignation have an additional argument, which is that

it's hard to think of any other option that Mr. Nixon hasn't already tried.

He has already barnstormed through Southern states; he has already stonewalled; he has already gone on television to explain exactly what happened; he has already given the American people "all the facts"; he has already met with Communist Party chief Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow. It's been a year since he argued that a year of Watergate was enough. He has, in short, tried everything. What else is left to try?

The President of the United States is a resourceful man and he still has enormous power. He may think of options which nobody else has thought about or he may reverse his character and simply play out his time.

But if you look at his situation in what now appears to be a realistic way—that is, by reviewing what happened in the House Judiciary Committee hearings and reviewing in the mind's eye the names and reputations of the senators who will constitute his jury—an angry resignation would seem the likely thing for Mr. Nixon to do.