

Impeachment, Not Resignation

For three months Mr. Nixon's most obdurate supporters swallowed his transcripts, bite by bite, and declared them spicy but digestible. It was like watching a chili-eating contest. The question was: How much could they swallow without throwing up?

The answer came when Mr. Nixon fed them the June 23, 1972 transcript.

Until then, Mr. Nixon's defense was that he learned of the cover-up March 21, 1973, and was so bewildered that he acted slowly to end it.

This defense was ludicrous. Even the dishonestly edited transcripts show that on March 13, 1973, Mr. Nixon and John Dean discussed Gordon Strachan's role in the cover-up, and on Feb. 28, 1973, they gloated that Judge John Sirica had been unable to crack the cover-up.

But the June 23, 1972 tape, a smoking howitzer, proves that Mr. Nixon ordered a limit on the FBI investigation of Watergate, and ordered this for political purposes. In short, he ordered a cover-up.

If the current impeachment process were a boxing match, the referee would stop the fight. Mr. Nixon has lost the ability to defend himself. That is why representatives and senators are clamoring for resignation.

But resignation, the perennial Watergate panacea, is still a pernicious idea because it would leave Mr. Nixon in a position to merchandise his anti-constitutional and amoral view of politics.

If you still doubt that Mr. Nixon has such a view, read the Aug. 16 issue of National Review magazine, in which a former White House speech writer recounts his involvement in drafting Spiro Agnew's televised valedictory last October.

The speech writer collaborated with another White House aide who spoke directly with Mr. Nixon on the Wednesday Agnew resigned:

"The President told him he had counseled Agnew Tuesday in these terms: the important thing is to stand unbowed, not to let 'them' think they've broken you. I've faced these situations, Nixon went on, everyone in politics has to face them, and you can weather them if you just refuse to



By Geoffrey Moss

appear as a beaten man. That, said the President, was the way he had survived the loss in 1960, and the way Agnew should meet this reversal."

The "them" to whom Mr. Nixon re-

ferred was Mr. Nixon's Justice Department. Agnew's "reversal" consisted of being associated with felonies so numerous that the Justice Department summary of them filled 40 pages.

And Mr. Nixon said that being associated with felonies is comparable to losing an election.

Mr. Nixon looks upon politics as an amoral field of forces, and, like Agnew, he probably believes he has sinned only in getting caught. His pep talk to Agnew is redundant evidence of the thinking that has reduced Mr. Nixon to ruin, and it is sobering evidence of the perverse and divisive things Mr. Nixon would say concerning his own resignation.

He would say, with a sincerity at once grotesque and pathetic, that he has done no serious wrong. Having escaped Senate conviction by resigning, he would say, with narrow technical accuracy, that nothing had been formally proved against him.

And to prove that he is unbeaten, he would incite his millions of bitter-end supporters against "them," meaning the rest of the nation.

So instead of egging Mr. Nixon on to resignation, Congress should do its duty, which involves more than just

prying Mr. Nixon loose from his desk. Congress' duty is to pronounce formal judgment against Mr. Nixon's conduct. Only that will cleanse the stain of Mr. Nixon and his men from our government.

Mr. Nixon has said that obstruction of justice is an impeachable offense. To any rational person, Mr. Nixon's release of the June 23 transcript constitutes a confession of such obstruction. Yet Mr. Nixon still pleads that his actions do not "justify" impeachment.

Until he personally, publicly, and explicitly acknowledges that he is guilty of an impeachable offense, he should not be encouraged to short-circuit constitutional processes by resigning. Until Mr. Nixon confesses, formal conviction by the Senate is the only way to draw his fangs.

Besides, if any representatives and senators still want to vote against impeachment or conviction, I, for one, want to know who they are. Even if only Carl Curtis (R-Neb.) wants to vote for Mr. Nixon, it serves the national interest to let Curtis make that revealing statement about himself.