

THE TRANSFER of power proceeded with dignity, as everyone assumed it would, and concluded on a strongly reassuring note. In his brief address following the oath of office, President Ford struck precisely the right tone on each of a succession of points to which, he knew, the country wanted to hear him speak. His words, simple and candid, were a flawless response to an extremely difficult situation.

Acknowledging that these circumstances had no precedent in American history, he made it self-evident that the Constitution had provided for them, and that the procedures of transfer entirely followed our traditions. Since he had not been elected to the office, he reasoned, he must bear an even broader responsibility to the whole country than the presidents who won on a partisan platform. As to the legitimacy of his authority, it lies technically in his confirmation as Vice President by a Congress whose members, as he said, "were my friends and are my friends." In the larger sense, legitimacy lies in his acceptance by the people of this country, and that overwhelming and warm acceptance cannot be doubted.

President Ford did not evade the painful subject of the events that brought him to the White House. The central fault of the past administration was its custom of dividing the world into its friends, whose obedience had to be absolute, and its enemies, whose hostility was assumed to be personal and implacable. The President offered his own judgment on this practice when he spoke of the virtue of charity in public life. As for the evils that led to his predecessor's downfall, President Ford again spoke directly: "I believe that truth is the glue that holds government together—not only our government but civilization itself. That bond, though strained, is unbroken at home and abroad. . . . My fellow Americans, our long national nightmare is over."

Now the country is prepared to move ahead to deal with other concerns, as President Ford urged. But at the same time it is important to remember that the deeply troubling issues raised by those scandals have by no means been finally settled. A return to these issues is inevitable, for many of them are involved in criminal prosecutions already under way. Some of the answers will doubtless appear in testimony yet to be taken and documents yet to be published. Mr. Nixon's resignation does not affect the trials already scheduled or the grand juries still in session. The difficult legal questions of access to the papers and tape recordings of the retiring President have yet to be explored.

A nation's conscience lies embedded in its history, and that is why it remains necessary to keep the his-

torical record as clear and complete as possible. Unfortunately, it is not possible simply to shut off the inquiries into the scandals of the past several years in the manner in which you might shut a book that had become tiresome. The crimes committed in those years affected the way that we were governed and may affect it again in the future. Prevention requires not only good intentions and sound leadership, but an explicit and detailed knowledge of what went wrong. Mr. Nixon said that he gave up his fight for "vindication" and resigned because his "political base" in Congress had dissolved. This moment is not the time to argue about the dismal inadequacy of this as a forthright explanation of what really caused Mr. Nixon to abandon his struggle against impeachment or to repeat the reasons why, at the end, even his closest friends in Congress warned him that their duty would require them to vote against him. He chose not to go through with the weeks of impeachment and trial in the Senate, he said, because the country's other business now requires the full attention of both President and Congress—and this, too, is disingenuous, for it might be answered that this country has no other business so urgent as defending the integrity of democratic government. In any event, the scandals had been allowed by Mr. Nixon to preoccupy not only his attention but that of the Congress for at least the past year. The House Judiciary Committee, earlier this month, voiced a series of profoundly important charges in its articles of impeachment. Mr. Nixon has essentially conceded the first article, which charged obstruction of justice in the Watergate case. But there are other equally heavy charges, bearing not only on Mr. Nixon personally but on the conduct of the presidency, that remain unacknowledged by him, and therefore unresolved.

President Ford, in his generous and temperate address yesterday, spoke of reconciling justice with mercy. He faces no more delicate and perplexing dilemma than dealing with the consequences of the last administration's misconduct. High officials of that administration are about to come to trial, and Mr. Nixon himself has now given up the special protections of his former office. Perhaps the only thing to be said with certainty is that the most painful and difficult choices in the whole affair still lie ahead.

But we have confidence that those choices will be made by a clear-headed and sensible government, with no purpose to serve but the national interest. President Ford's words yesterday were evidence that he is in tune with the country as a whole. A man who deals in so open and honest a manner with the American people cannot fail to retain their support.