

president

Firestorm in Washington

ONLY a fortnight ago, confidence still abounded in the White House. Presidential supporters scoffed at the possibility of impeachment, and one aide asserted: "We've got 40 to 50 votes against conviction by the Senate, all day, every day."

But that was before the hammer blow fell in the House. The Articles of Impeachment approved by the House Judiciary Committee 12 days ago included 15 specific counts — most of them falling under one or more criminal statutes — including obstruction of justice, conspiracy, making false statements, illegal wiretapping, subornation of perjury, violation of civil rights, misuse of tax information and misprision of a felony.

In the days immediately following the Judiciary Committee's action, public attitudes toward the impeachment process underwent a dramatic shift.

Support for the impeachment, conviction and removal from office of President Nixon grew substantially — until, by last week, the latest Harris Survey showed that fully two thirds of the American people now believed that the House of Representatives should impeach the President. In two weeks, public sentiment for impeachment had grown from 53-34 to 66-27 per cent.

"We face an uphill struggle . . . a political struggle," said deputy press secretary Gerald Warren. "If you had to make odds . . . you'd have to place the President in the role of the underdog."

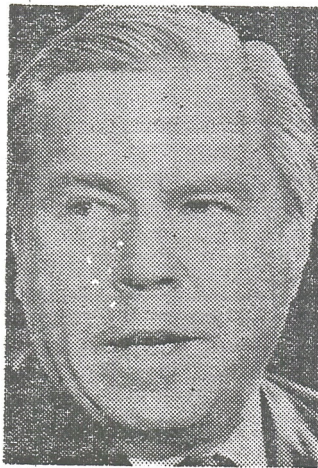
In the Senate, a conservative Nixon loyalist lamented: "Everything Nixon touches seems to turn to ashes. Each time we go down there (to the White House) we are told to wait for the good news — but it never comes."

'Foregone Conclusion'

What came last week, instead, was some very bad news indeed for Mr. Nixon's supporters. On Monday morning, the President released the transcripts of three more White House tape recordings — along with an astonishing statement.

Calling his impeachment by the House "virtually a foregone conclusion," the President conceded that the new recordings clearly

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showed that he had early knowledge of the Watergate coverup, contrary to previous statements denying his involvement.

"I recognize that this additional material I am now

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furnishing may further damage my case," the President declared, admitting that important information contained in the new tapes not only had been withheld from the public but from his attorney, James St. Clair, and the White House staff as well as the House Judiciary Committee.

"This was a serious act of omission," he said, "for which I take full responsibility and which I deeply regret."

The new tapes covered three conversations Mr. Nixon had with his former top aide, H. R. Haldeman, on

June 23, 1972 — four days after the burglary of the Democratic National Headquarters at Watergate.

The two men were revealed to have been discussing how best to stall the FBI investigation that had started soon after the arrests, finally agreeing to use the CIA to pressure the FBI into halting its investigation on the grounds that a full-scale inquiry might uncover some covert Central Intelligence Agency operations.

In Conflict

At one point, Mr. Nixon told Haldeman to call CIA officials and "just say this is a comedy of errors without getting into it; the President believes it is going to just open the whole Bay of Pigs thing up again . . . and that they should call the FBI in and (unintelligible) don't go any further into this case. Period!"

Mr. Nixon conceded that the tapes were in conflict with a statement he made on May 22, in which he said his only concern was "national security" in warning that the FBI might run afoul of CIA operations.

The revelations from three of the 64 tapes that the Supreme Court had ordered Mr. Nixon to turn over to Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski were enough to send shock waves through both the Senate and the House.

What was described as a "firestorm" in Congress, equal to or worse than that of last fall when the Presi-

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dent fired then special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox, exploded after Mr. Nixon's admission that he had withheld damaging evidence about his involvement in the Watergate break-in.

'Smoking Gun'

Key Republican leaders in both chambers reacted to the statement by strongly suggesting that Mr. Nixon be removed from office. Rep. Barber Conable (Rep-N.Y.) said the latest White House statement 'seems to provide the 'smoking gun' that incontrovertibly links the President to the Watergate cover-up."

All ten Republicans on the House Judiciary Committee who opposed every article of impeachment changed their minds after the new Nixon disclosure of withholding of evidence from the committee.

Those who reconsidered were Republican Representatives Charles Wiggins of California, David Dennis of Indiana, Wiley Mayne of Iowa, Joseph Mazariti of New Jersey, Edward Hutchinson of Michigan, Henry Smith III of New York, Carlos Moorhead of California, Trent Lott of Mississippi, Delbert Latta of Ohio and Joseph Sandman of New Jersey.

Wiggins, who had carried the main burden of Mr. Nixon's defense, declared: "After considerable reflection, I have reached the painful conclusion that the President of the United States should resign."

House Minority Leader John Rhodes of Arizona also announced that he would vote for Article I of the impeachment resolution, dealing with the Watergate cover-up, thus assuring that Mr.

Nixon would be buried under an avalanche of pro-impeachment votes in the House.

In the Senate, Republican whip Griffin, who had been agonizing privately over whether to call for the President to resign before his trial ever came to the Senate, called a news conference to state:

"I think we've arrived at the point where both the national and his own interests would best be served by resigning."

'No Intention'

Nevertheless, early last week, following a meeting of his full cabinet, Mr. Nixon announced that he had no intention of resigning and that the constitutional process should be allowed to run its course.

But by midweek the pressures on the President to resign were almost unbearable. On Wednesday afternoon Mr. Nixon met with his family and with top Republican leaders — Senators Barry Goldwater of Arizona and Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania and House leader Rhodes — amid a flurry of reports that he had already decided to resign.

Wednesday night, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who under law must accept a president's resignation, made a late unscheduled call to the White House. Thursday morning, President Nixon summoned Vice President Ford to the Oval Office.

Shortly thereafter, Rep. Rhodes stated unequivocally that Mr. Nixon would resign. And at 9 p.m., e.d.t., Richard Milhous Nixon — on the 2026th day of his presidency — went on nationwide television to make his historic announcement.



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REPRESENTATIVE WIGGINS

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