



The Presidency of Richard Nixon

— Joseph Kraft

FORMER President Nixon has at last brought us together. The country is now united in contempt for the leader who betrayed every value and every friend in a desperate effort to save his own skin.

But the ignoble manner of Mr. Nixon's departure should not blind us to the larger meaning of his presidency.

When Mr. Nixon took office back in 1969, American pretension far outran American capabilities. American forces, especially in Vietnam, were supposed to hold the balance against any change deemed favorable to either Russia or China. The American market, opened to the world by a lopsided exchange rate and a one-way commitment to buy gold, supported prosperity in Japan and Western Europe.

In this country it was widely believed that prosperity without recession had arrived, and that inflation could be held in check by the device of an income policy.

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MR. NIXON'S great achievement was to bring expectations more in line with reality. He engaged the Chinese Communists and brought them out of isolation. He then addressed himself to Moscow. By squeezing the Russians with the threat of a China deal, he was able to pull out of Vietnam on terms far more favorable than ever offered to previous regimes.

By the same means, he was able to start the most important barrier yet erected against the danger of nuclear war — the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty reached with Russia in 1972.

Far less success attended Mr. Nixon's efforts at home. But during his term in office, everybody came to realize that in-

flation was an intractable problem. The danger that the battle against rising prices could tip into recession came dramatically home.

All of us learned that government programs do not suffice to amend the social ills of centuries — and that there was a tight limit on what was available for such programs.

Had Mr. Nixon been able to articulate these achievements, had he been able to declare the virtue of sober realism and falling expectations, he might have come safely to the end of his term. But Mr. Nixon never saw himself as the leader of all the people. At all times he was in his own eyes the candidate of a minority.

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SO INSTEAD of an adjustment in foreign policy, he announced what clearly did not exist — a structure of peace. Instead of admitting the country had lost its way in domestic policy, he proclaimed a new prosperity.

Instead of reconciling doubters, and drawing to his side old foes, he salted the wounds. He and his men battered the media. They insulted the congress and sabotaged the democrats.

When trouble came in the form of Watergate. Mr. Nixon was without the human contacts which are the stuff of reality. Out of pride and sycophancy there was born a monstrous fraud. Contempt for others fostered the belief that lies and tricks would work even as mounting evidence showed the truth would out. In the end, Mr. Nixon was alone, divorced from friends and reality in a psychic bunker of his own making.