

WXPost

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR SEP 12 1974

Reactions to the Pardon of Mr. Nixon

Let us hope that those who congratulated themselves upon how well our "democratic" system worked in the Nixon affair will now withdraw into chastened silence. Our system has established that a President may violate the Constitution in any conceivable way so long as he is not discovered in the commission of violations of criminal statutes; furthermore, in view of President Ford's gift of unconditional amnesty for Mr. Nixon, that a President is immune to prosecution even for criminal acts, and will be considered to have suffered enough by the mere fact of revelation; and, finally that the utmost punishment to which a President will be exposed for any act of misbehavior is retirement with a plush pension and a blank check on the U.S. Treasury for staff and expenses, as well as full freedom to hold responsible office in the future.

I can think of no crime for which anyone is serving time in any prison in the country that is more dangerous to the public than the long train of abuses for which the Nixon administration has been cited. I can think of no act of principled opposition to the Indochina war by any draft resister, evader, or deserter that exposed the notion of democratic institutions to the danger raised by Mr. Nixon's concept, and practice, of absolute executive authority. And yet Mr. Nixon is now released from all responsibility for his conduct, indeed is rewarded for it, while others pay for theirs.

Two conclusions, I believe, follow. One: the Nixon administration is not over, but continues in a slightly different form. Two: all the unctuous pleas for self-sacrifice by the American public in fighting inflation must be stubbornly refused by a citizenry now aware, if it was not before, that our system of equal justice under law actually rests on unequal sacrifice by many for the underserved benefit of a few.

Barbara J. Fields.

Washington.

'A Denial of Justice'

It is with deep regret and sadness that I opened my morning paper to read what I somehow had hoped would not happen under this new and "refreshing" Ford administration.

Richard Nixon's pardon from further criminal prosecution has diminished us all, but even worse has shown that Gerald Ford speaks the same double-talk that has been the flag of his predecessors in the past 10 years.

He has denied the American people justice while telling us we are in return being spared further turmoil, that we are being unified while in fact many people are more embittered and turned off to the system by this disgraceful decision.

But worst of all, he has flouted his power in the face of every man and woman in this country who believed that our judicial system would work regardless of politics and party loyalties. It is said Nixon felt exulted at the decision—I don't wonder.

I can't help but see flashing before my eyes a poster that was popular during the height of Nixon's reign—the gleeful visage with the caption, "Why is this man laughing?"

John L. Franklin.

Reston.

Ed. Note: President Ford's decision to pardon Richard Nixon has generated a sizeable number of letters of reaction and comment. As of Wednesday afternoon, The Post had received 253 letters—248 opposing Mr. Ford's action and five favoring it. An initial sampling of the letters is printed here. Additional letters on the controversy will be printed in the next few days.

Watergate's Lesson

The pardon of Richard Nixon is surely the greatest miscarriage of justice of this century. It strongly suggests toleration of official misconduct which could bring as much discredit upon Mr. Ford's administration as befell that of the man who elevated him to his present post. If Nixon deserves a pardon, can we expect Mr. Ford to see anything wrong with CAB's Timm accepting free vacations from executives of the industry he is charged with regulating? Will Mr. Ford even notice, let alone be offended by the blatant racism and sexism of Labor's Brennan and NASA's Fletcher?

The lesson of Watergate is that we need integrity in government and accountability of its leaders. The lesson of the Ford-Nixon pardon deal is that we have two more years of Ford-Nixon morality to endure.

Ann Hogan.

Bethesda.

Setting a Precedent?

Well, of course, it was to be expected that President Ford would grant executive clemency to Richard M. Nixon.

After all, who chose Gerald M. Ford as his Vice President and successor? Richard M. Nixon.

And to whom is Gerald M. Ford indebted for making him President of the United States? Richard M. Nixon. (Not the voters of the United States.)

But this makes it no less shocking that the former top law enforcement officer of our nation should be unconditionally forgiven for any and all laws he had broken while serving as President.

Does this not set a precedent for future Presidents that they can feel free to break any laws they want to and all will be forgiven?

Betty Kearney.

Arlington.

Alternative Service

President Ford has set a fascinating precedent—and incidentally extended the Watergate coverup—by granting a "blindfold pardon" for a crime as yet undisclosed.

Now that this first of his proposed amnesties has been granted, we'll all be wondering what expiatory alternative service one can ask of a former President.

Perhaps a stint in some field hospital might be appropriate. There, in keeping with his own favorite self-characterization, Richard Nixon could continue to bind up the nation's wounds.

Donna Shor.

Washington.

Lesson for the Young

President Ford's pardon of Mr. Nixon in advance of Mr. Nixon's potential conviction of a crime will leave our younger generation of future leaders bewildered for many years.

Once again our children and young adults have learned that crime does not pay—unless you happen to be at the top.

Charles J. Gueriera.

Manassas.

Beyond Justice's Bounds

The pardon is not only premature, but outside the bounds of justice.

Catherine V. Shea.

Arlington.

The Darkest Hour

If any single act in the history of man could have had a comparable effect in destroying the respect of law-abiding citizens for "the law," I pray that President Ford will bring it to the world's attention promptly.

As one who has spent 49 years in newspaper and public relations work, I see Mr. terHorst's resignation as the bright ray of light and hope in what—to me—has become our darkest hour, far eclipsing Watergate.

Paul L. Eden.

Cleveland.

A Vulnerable System

President Ford's total pardon of Richard M. Nixon for wrongdoings he "may have" committed in office seeks to put an end to the Watergate affair in the interest of domestic tranquility. Are we then not to learn what we should from this matter? By this rash act, the President has thrown away our best hope to discover finally what did happen in the White House these past six years. Wanting to know this is not simply idle curiosity. Nor is the purpose to "draw and quarter" an ex-President.

What is important to understand from all of this is that our constitutional system of government appears quite vulnerable to serious abuse by those in power, and that the basic liberties guaranteed to us all may not be all that assured. Nor does it appear that we can always rely on the wisdom of a democratically determined majority to place in power only the most honest and best intentioned. The idea is to prevent or at least minimize the possibility of such abuse of power. That is what the rule of law is all about. That is what the heart of our Constitution is all about. That is what the American Revolution was all about. And that is what pursuing the Watergate affair through our system of justice was all about.

The President's act of mercy was seriously misguided and terribly mistimed. It does damage to our principle of equal justice under the law. The time for mercy comes after it has been established what crimes have been committed and if the party concerned was guilty of them. Why did he have to do this now?

Saul J. Blaustein.

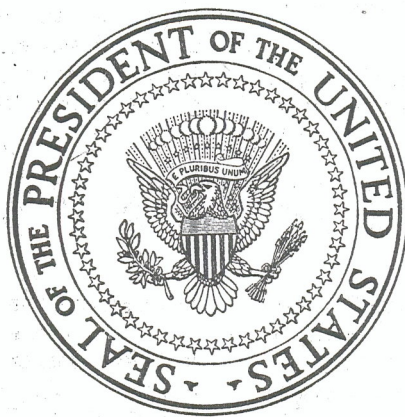
Silver Spring.

'A Miscarriage of Justice'

The honeymoon is over. The incredible event which transpired Sunday, Sept 8, 1974, compels me to write this political commentary. It is the contention of this writer that President Ford's "full, free, and absolute" pardon of former President Nixon for "high crimes and misdemeanors" committed in his (Nixon's) conduct of the presidency, constitutes a gross and inordinate miscarriage of justice. It is a miscarriage of justice when the system of due process is subverted, and when "equal justice under law" is applicable to 220 million Americans minus one.

Webster defines "miscarriage" as "to give birth to prematurely." There should be no argument that Ford acted prematurely. In essence, Ford prejudged and summarily dismissed the 9,888 pages of evidence amassed by Chief Counsel John Doar and the various crimes which comprise the three Articles of Impeachment. The pardoning of Nixon is not at issue, but the timing is. To be sure, this was a carefully calculated and orchestrated maneuver when one stops to consider why Mr. Ford would announce a decision of such magnitude at 11:00 a.m. (EDT) on a Sunday morning. To absolve Richard Nixon of the crimes which comprise the three Articles of Impeachment is to abort the system of due process guaranteed under the Constitution.

As the moderator of "To Tell The Truth" would ask, I, similarly hasten to ask: "Would the real Jerry Ford please stand up?" After taking the presidential Oath of Office on Friday, Aug. 9, 1974, Mr. Ford, in his Inaugural Address promised "openness and candor." He declared: "I believe that truth is the glue that holds government together—not only our government but civilization itself . . . our great republic is a government of laws and not of men. Here the people rule."



Those were Ford's words, but his presidential actions speak louder than his words. For he has shown by virtue of this pardon that one man can be and is above the law.

By hastily choosing to exercise his pardon power granted to him under Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution, Mr. Ford has delivered a knock-out punch of hypocrisy and duplicity at the American system of criminal justice. Ostensibly, it is a vindication of a new theory of presidential non-accountability under law.

The President has set a precarious precedent for it could conceivably give license to future Presidents, who may commit "high crimes and misdemeanors" during their incumbency, to expect pardons from their criminal transgressions. Under our American system of justice, a man is presumed innocent until proven guilty. But Mr. Ford's pardon of Nixon presupposes guilt.

It is a dangerous precedent in that it established a standard of duplicity; a double standard of justice in which one man is above the law, thus destroying his inaugural assertion that

this is a "government of laws and not of men."

Mr. Ford's decision to exonerate Nixon from crimes committed against the United States will open up a "Pandora's Box" which could have serious legal and political ramifications. In the interest of fairness and consistency, the President must now give due and timely consideration to pardoning the others who have been convicted of Watergate crimes and to those who will stand trial for these related crimes. And, inevitably, he must heavily weigh giving a blanket pardon and amnesty to the Vietnam deserters and draft-dodgers whose actions do not nearly approach the criminal magnitude of Richard Nixon. His pardon action did not shut and seal the book as he initially thought. It merely reopened it.

If truth is the glue which cements this government and civilization alike, how does pardoning Nixon constitute truth or a search for the truth? Resignation left many questions unanswered, and the criminal justice system via due process would have sought to remedy this. With this pardon, it is now virtually impossible to elicit a clear record of what happened in the Watergate affair. And to have agonizingly weathered the Watergate storm for two years, I feel the American people and posterity deserve more than that.

It would be well for Mr. Ford to listen to some "straight talk" from the Preamble of the Constitution which states: "We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish justice . . ." Gerald Ford, by virtue of his presidential pardon of Richard Nixon, has taken a step to form a more imperfect Union which does not insure domestic tranquillity.

Steven R. Jones.

Washington.

Unconstitutional Pardon

President Ford has violated Article II, Section 2 of the Constitution by his so-called pardon of Mr. Nixon. The section of the Constitution he invoked refers only to "reprieves" and "pardons." It does not extend to granting immunity from prosecution before charges have been brought. Furthermore, this section specifically excludes "cases of impeachment," and Mr. Nixon's case falls into that class by any reasonable interpretation of what the framers of the Constitution intended. They obviously did not intend to have the impeachment of a President taken out of the hands of the Congress by any subterfuge. On these grounds the action of President Ford should be challenged by the Special Prosecutor and brought to the Supreme Court for resolution.

Saul Rosenzweig.

St. Louis.

'Proceed With Impeachment'

The Watergate mentality is alive and well and still residing in the White House.

In order to restore some semblance of justice in the nation, it would be appropriate for Congress to go ahead with the impeachment and conviction of Nixon.

George Woodbury.

Silver Spring.

Compassion and Conscience

Now that Watergate is behind President Ford, he can turn his compassion and conscience to pardoning the men who have been estranged from their country and families for so many years.

They have suffered enough also.

Margaret M. Ernst.

Takoma Park.

Appalled

I was appalled to hear the news of President Ford's pardon of Richard Nixon. What a horrendous example he has shown to the American people—that one man can do such an injustice to society and get away with it.

Richard Nixon was aware he was committing a wrongdoing when he participated in the Watergate coverup, and if that were not bad enough, he repeatedly lied to the American public. To resign with a sizeable pension, salaries for his staff and all those other goodies does not warrant the belief that he has suffered enough. I'm not out for blood, but no doubt about it, the man is getting off easy.

It just goes to prove that certain members of society can do as they please and get away with it. Those who are less affluent and commit the same type of crime would be placed behind bars. What in God's name is this country coming to?

M. C. Donohue.

Annandale.