

Ford's Route to Nixon Pardon

"EVEN FOR THOSE OF US who share President Ford's belief that it would be wrong to put Mr. Nixon on trial," says Joseph Kraft (writing his column prior to the President's Monday evening press conference), "it is hard not to suspect that there was some kind of a deal between the former President and the man now in the White House."

Kraft was voicing a suspicion that many Americans had shared with him during a week of bewildered speculation; a week in which the pardoned President was variously reported to be disconsolate and morose, busy and in good spirits, walking on a left leg swollen twice the size of his right, and fearing to go to a hospital lest he never come out alive; a week of growing congressional skepticism about the \$850,000 fund requested by Mr. Ford to see to Mr. Nixon's transition from the White House to a private ex-presidential life by the shores of the Pacific.

THESE CONTRADICTIONARY SNIPPETS of information were certainly "not made less mysterious by Dr. Walter Tkach's astonishing statement to Newsweek that although it would take a "miracle" for Nixon to recover, he hadn't discussed his condition with Mrs. Nixon for fear of alarming her.

It seems to us that in the midst of all this confusion Mr. Ford is the one man who has come through as the least confusing. We thought he was forthright and effective at his press conference Monday night in putting to rest some of the doubts that reasonable and fair-minded persons have been weighing. He had no "secret reason" for granting the pardon; it was an idea on which he started action immediately after his August 28 press conference, when he put his counsel to work on the constitutionality of it. He learned Nixon would very possibly be charged with obstructing justice and 10 other criminal acts; he was informed this process would drag out for a year; he kept track of the former President's health almost solely through news reports; the main thing that concerned him was not healing the President but the wounds of the country.

Granted that an undoubted majority of the country, this newspaper among it, felt he pardoned the ex-President prematurely, there appear no reasonable grounds to fault him on the route by which he reached his decision. Mr. Ford succeeded in leaving the impression of having followed a direct, uncoerced, unbargained-for course from initiation to proclamation in the presidential pardon affair. At all events the act is done and won't conceivably be reversed or upset. It represents Mr. Ford's honest conviction of his duty in the best interest of the country and entertaining suspicions of it representing something more than that, something devious and under the table, will probably help nobody. The habit of suspecting every act in Washington is a habit taught by Watergate which we must learn to kick.