

It's Up To Congress

By Anthony Lewis

BOSTON, Sept. 18—A few hours before the press conference, someone deeply committed to President Ford was reflecting on what he needed to do. Above all, this person said, Mr. Ford had to show that he was his own man, not tied to Richard Nixon in person or policy. For example, he should take care to avoid entanglement in whatever the C.I.A. may have done in Chile during the Nixon years.

When he was asked about Chile that night, Mr. Ford proceeded to clasp the C.I.A. to his bosom. He said it had acted only to protect the opposition press and parties from the Allende Government — ignoring the fact that the military regime, unlike Allende, has banned all opposition and murdered and tortured thousands. He blandly concluded that U. S. interference had been "in the best interest" of Chile.

People are increasingly puzzled at Mr. Ford's performance, and that answer indicates why they are. Why should he gratuitously tie himself to a Nixon program that at a minimum involved deception of Congress and the public? Who would advise him to do such a thing, and offer him such lame arguments? What kind of judgment must he have to take the advice?

When he became President, he seemed to understand so well the need to separate himself from the horrors of the immediate past. Now, just a few weeks later, he gives every sign of having lost that understanding.

Item. Mr. Ford lets his own White House budget be used to provide the Nixons with a valet and maid, a \$36,000-a-year secretary, a chauffeur, a speechwriter and sixteen other helpers. Who had the idea of slipping the money past Congress that way, some Nixon holdover like Roy Ash?

Item. A few weeks ago, when an inherited White House lawyer was caught dissembling on the subject of the Nixon tapes, Mr. Ford dispatched

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him and undertook to safeguard the tapes. Then, without notice, he approved a deal with Mr. Nixon that would endanger the access to the tapes and Nixon papers needed by the Watergate special prosecutor.

Item. Mr. Ford allows White House staff members closely identified with Mr. Nixon to linger on, despite conflicts with his own people. He shows special consideration for the Nixon staff chief, Gen. Alexander Haig, forcing his appointment as NATO supreme commander over allied objections. This is the same General Haig who was shown by a published tape on June 4, 1973, to have encouraged Mr. Nixon in his deception on Watergate.

Gerald Ford remains a likable human being, with no evidence of his predecessor's dark obsessions. But sometimes he makes it hard to be sure who is President. During the press conference he referred to Mr. Nixon eight times as "the President." Was that just slowness of mind, or something more revealing?

Whatever the explanation of Gerald Ford's course, it is clear now that he is not going to be the miraculous figure for whom so many yearned. There is some good in that, if we recognize it, for we still need warnings against reliance on Presidents. But if we are realistic about the limitations of the Presidency and Mr. Ford, then we must look to Congress to take up some of the responsibility that it has abandoned to Presidents over the last thirty years.

The very issues handled in so puzzling a way by Mr. Ford demonstrate the need for Congress to play a larger role. An obvious example is the continuing use of White House funds for Mr. Nixon. Congress should act swiftly to see that he gets no public money except what is directly appropriated for him, and that limited to anything required by law.

On the pardon, the continuing controversy about General Haig's role and the absence of any real explanation from Mr. Ford for acting so hastily suggest that there should be a Congressional inquiry. In any event, Congress must make sure that all the facts come out despite the pardon. It should give the special prosecutor any further powers he needs to tell the full story, including assured access to the Nixon papers and tapes.

The appointment of General Haig to the NATO post cries out for the most careful Congressional examination. What was his role in the obstruction of the special prosecutor and the Senate Watergate Committee, and in the illegal White House wiretapping?

Not least, there is the large question of the C.I.A. and Chile. That is a special test of the Congressional will, for in the past Congress has notoriously shirked its duty of oversight in regard to C.I.A. activities. There is an old-boy network: the senior members of Congress who often cover up for the dirty tricks of their friends in the national security business.

When the House Judiciary Committee voted to impeach Mr. Nixon, Representative Walter Flowers of Alabama warned that Congress would be judged in future by the way it exercised its rediscovered power—"by our willingness to share in the many hard choices that must be made for our nation." The experience of that proceeding showed us that there are many persons of real ability and judgment in Congress. We shall see now whether they have the will.