

NYTimes
The
JUL 21 1975
Glorious
Revolution

By Anthony Lewis

24 Jul 74 - House Judiciary Committee begins final deliberations on possible impeachment of Nixon.

We celebrate this week the first anniversary of a great occasion in American history, a transforming moment in our lives. One year ago Peter Rodino rapped his gavel and asked his colleagues to proceed "in good will, with honor and decency." The country watched on television as the House Committee on the Judiciary debated the impeachment of a President.

The faces and the voices of those 38 committee members remain very much with us. It is as Shakespeare had Henry V say before the Battle of Agincourt: "This day is call'd the Feast of Crispian . . . And (it) shall ne'er go by . . . but we in it shall be remembered."

And their words. Barbara Jordan of Texas: "My faith in the Constitution is whole, it is complete, it is total, and I am not going to sit here and be an idle spectator to the diminution, the subversion, the destruction of the Constitution." James Mann of South Carolina: "If there be no accountability, another President will feel free to do as he chooses. The next time there may be no watchman in the night."

For six nights and days the Judiciary Committee wrestled with evidence and conscience and history. It voted three articles of impeachment

ABROAD AT HOME

against Richard Nixon, charging that he had failed his constitutional duty to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed" by obstructing justice, abusing his power and ignoring the committee's subpoenas.

The proceedings were prolonged and contentious, but their very untidiness was satisfying in the end. The 38 committee members were intensely American in their variety. To see them, I wrote at the time, was to see ourselves as guardians of the Constitution—and that was strangely reassuring.

Perhaps we romanticized that week. Even as it happened, we were aware that our expectations for a post-Nixon America were probably too high.

A year later there is, indeed, reason for disappointment. It was the sense of the possibilities in America that exhilarated us in the summer of 1974, and that has been deflated. There is an aimless quality to our political life now, unfocused, dreary.

We knew a year ago, as the Nixon Presidency sank, that Gerald Ford would not give us exciting leadership. We thought we had had enough excitement for a while. But we may not have been prepared for a mediocrity so suffocating.

He is a decent man: We said it then and still say it now. But he is also a man of massive insensitivity to the pain and diversity of life. His outlook is parochial, his philosophy evidently founded on the belief that wealth is nobility, his vision so limited that he lets himself be led into indicating to the world that he fears the ideas of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. Geniality without understanding is not enough in a President.

Then there is Congress. One of the memorable moments in the Judiciary Committee proceedings last year was the statement by Walter Flowers of Alabama, just before he voted to impeach, that henceforth more would be expected of Congress.

"We will and should be judged," Mr. Flowers said, "by our willingness to share in the many hard choices that must be made for our nation . . . I want my friends to know that I will be around to remind them when some of these hard choices are up, and we will be able to judge then how responsible we can be with our newly found Congressional power."

How far from that standard is the reality. A Congress that came to Washington last January with trumpet calls of reform and activism has lost its way—has lost even its self-respect. The House of Representatives has actually just spent days punishing one of its members, Michael Harrington of Massachusetts, because he violated the Old Boys' code and told about some of the Central Intelligence Agency's wrongdoing.

The measure of disappointed expectations was in one event above all: the Mayaguez affair. After the years of futile brutality in Vietnam, the automatic reaction of the Executive to a pin prick was bombs. After all the lessons of Watergate, the response of Congress to the crude violation of limits that it had itself imposed was to cheer. So much for responsibility and respect for law one year after our rededication to the Constitution.

Of course the enduring problems of society are more complicated than Watergate. The riddles of energy or the Middle East do not have clear solutions acceptable to nearly everyone. We can look back on the evil of Richard Nixon with a certain nostalgia for a problem with only one right answer.

Looking back tempers our sense of letdown. We are free from the burden of a criminal President—and we freed ourselves. Nothing can dim that achievement; nothing should make us forget that moment of shared wonder and love of country in the summer of 1974.