
COMMENT

A CALL TO ACTION

Crisis. The word has been overworked by all of us, and particularly by those engaged in reporting, analyzing, and interpreting the news. We have been recording monthly, weekly, daily crises for longer than we care to remember—foreign and domestic crises, military and political crises, economic, moral, and cultural crises. A headlined crisis no longer generates alarm, or even profound concern. Ho hum, another crisis. . . .

But the crisis that grips America today is of another, higher magnitude—one that deserves, perhaps, a new term that has not been eroded by abuse. It swirls, of course, around the person of the President of the United States, but it impinges on every facet of the national life and character. We are confronted, suddenly and dramatically, with fundamental questions about our national community—questions that demand swift and decisive answers.

Are we prepared, after almost 200 years, to abandon our experiment—intermittently successful but always hopeful—in enlightened self-government? Will we permit our highest and most powerful office—an office whose occupant can literally decide the future and even the survival of the nation and the world—to remain in the hands of a man who has, in the words of the American Civil Liberties Union, “made one thing perfectly clear: He will function above the law whenever he can get away with it”? Will we refrain, because of our timidity or sheer inertia, from availing ourselves of the remedies provided by the Constitution of the United States for precisely such an emergency?

Three years remain in Richard M. Nixon’s second Presidential term—time enough for him to compound and render irreversible the catastrophic damage he has already done. It is understandable that the President may feel that if he can survive in office for those three years, he will have achieved a measure of vindication. But his vindication will be our indictment and conviction. If we, the American people, knowing what we now know about this President and his Administration, permit him to serve out his term, we will

stand condemned in history for the grave offense of murdering the American dream.

These pages go to press amidst a chorus of demands for Mr. Nixon’s resignation. The demands emanate not only from Mr. Nixon’s long-standing critics—his “enemies,” as he would doubtless style them—but from many who were, until recently, among his most enthusiastic supporters. The editors of *Time*, in the first editorial of the magazine’s fifty-year history—at least the first so labeled—called on him to “give up the Presidency rather than do further damage to the country.” The same suggestion has been advanced by newspapers which, only a little more than a year ago, were unreservedly advocating his re-election and which, only months ago, were minimizing the gravity of the Watergate disclosures; by Republican politicians who fear, not without justification, that the President is now an intolerable burden to their party; by businessmen who no longer can vest their confidence in Mr. Nixon as the chosen instrument of corporate prosperity.

Mr. Nixon would derive some obvious benefits if he were to heed this advice and relinquish his office. Unlike his recently departed Vice President, Spiro T. Agnew, he would not have to couple his resignation with a guilty plea to any crime. Like Mr. Agnew, he could continue to proclaim his innocence—and to denounce his “enemies”—in perpetuity. He has always relished the role of victim, and he could carry it to oblivion.

At the same time, the Congress would be spared from exercising a responsibility which it clearly does not welcome—the responsibility of impeaching the President of the United States. And the American people, the people who only a year ago gave the President an unprecedented mandate and whose disenchantment has now reached unprecedented depths, could breathe a deep sigh and go about the business of restoring a measure of order and hope to their national affairs.

But the decision to resign is, ultimately, the President’s alone to make, and the word from the White

House at this writing is that he will not be moved (or removed). He has "no intention whatever of walking away from the job I was elected to do," he told the nation on November 7.

It is our judgment, and we believe it is the American people's judgment, that the job he has done is enough.

Until and unless the President changes his mind about resigning, the decision to resolve the crisis that grips the nation will be ours to make—for only by exerting immense and unremitting pressure can we convince the Congress that it must discharge its constitutional responsibility. Public opinion has already persuaded some legislators to abandon their customary vacillating stance. Public opinion, forcefully applied, can move the requisite number of Representatives to embark on the process of impeachment.

The first order of business confronting Congress is to fill the vacancy in the Vice Presidency. Mr. Nixon's designee, Representative Gerald R. Ford of Michigan, would hardly be our first (or thousandth) choice; he is,

in our view, unsuited intellectually and politically to hold the nation's highest office. But given the choice—and it is the choice we are given—between mediocrity (Mr. Ford) and moral disgrace (Mr. Nixon), we have no difficulty choosing the former. America has muddled through with mediocre leadership before, but it cannot go on much longer with leadership that is morally bankrupt.

Once a Vice President has been installed, the "engine of impeachment"—James Madison's term—can be set in motion. It is an engine that the leaders of the House and Senate clearly would prefer not to start, but it can be ignited by any member of the House of Representatives who chooses to take the floor and declare: "Mr. Speaker, I rise to a question of constitutional privilege. . . . I impeach Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors." Citing only the facts that have already come to light, that have for the most part been verified, this member of the House can invite his colleagues to do their constitutional duty by considering the charges against the President in

A Bill of Impeachment

I. Richard M. Nixon, President of the United States, through his personal acts and those of his appointees and aides, has fostered, tolerated, and attempted to conceal the worst political scandals in this nation's history, thereby paralyzing the Government, inviting the contempt of the American people, and casting discredit on our country and its leadership throughout the world.

II. He is and must be held accountable for the crimes committed by many of his subordinates, for it is his responsibility, as Madison observed, "to superintend their conduct so as to check their excesses." If he was aware of their offenses, he is criminally culpable; if he was unaware, he is criminally inept.

III. He has attained and retained the high office he now holds through the use of illegal means, to wit: His agents have extracted secret and unlawful campaign contributions from various special interests in return for pledges of favorable government action in their behalf; they have authorized and commissioned snoopers and second-story men, styled "plumbers," to burglarize and spy on his political opponents, in violation of the common criminal statutes; they have hired saboteurs to employ various "dirty tricks" to disrupt a political campaign.

IV. He has attempted to undermine, circumvent, or annul the guarantees of the Bill of Rights—particularly the rights to privacy, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press—by: mounting an unprecedented campaign of harassment and vilification against the media of news and information; employing illegal wiretaps to spy on journalists and critics of his Administration; encouraging his aides to devise means of intimidating the media by use of governmental powers; embarking on political trials designed to silence those who dissented from his policies.

V. He has arrogated to himself powers not conferred by the Constitution, or powers expressly reserved to Congress, to wit: He has secretly, illegally, and deceptively ordered the bombing of a nation—Cambodia—without the knowledge or consent of the American people and their elected representatives; he has unlawfully impounded Federal funds totaling many millions of dollars that were duly appropriated by Congress in legislation he himself had signed; he has invoked a nebulous and dubious doctrine of "executive privilege" to withhold from the people information about the people's business.

VI. He has employed fraudulent schemes to muster—

or create an appearance of—public support for his Administration's major policies, especially with respect to the unlawful invasion and bombing of Cambodia. These schemes have involved the placement of newspaper advertisements concocted in the White House, the generation of inspired letters and telegrams of support, and the manipulation of public opinion polls.

VII. He and his associates have conspired in sundry schemes to obstruct justice by: attempting to withhold evidence in criminal cases pertaining to the Watergate Affair; dismissing the Special Prosecutor, Archibald Cox, when he proved determined to do his job; tendering bribes to defendants and witnesses to induce them to remain silent or offer perjured testimony; persuading the former director of the FBI to destroy evidence; invoking "non-existing conflicts with CIA operations" to thwart an FBI inquiry; attempting to influence the judge in the Pentagon Papers trial; ordering the Attorney General not to press a series of antitrust actions against the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation.

VIII. He has subverted the integrity of various Federal agencies by sanctioning efforts to: bring about a reversal of the Agriculture Department's policy on dairy price supports to accommodate major campaign contributors; involve the CIA and the FBI in unlawful operations associated with the operations of the "plumbers;" exert pressure on independent regulatory agencies to hand down decisions favorable to his friends and supporters; employ the Internal Revenue Service to punish his "enemies."

IX. He has conducted his personal affairs in a manner that directly contravenes the traditional Presidential obligation to demonstrate "moral leadership," to wit: He has used substantial amounts of the taxpayers' money to pay for certain improvements and maintenance of his private homes—expenditures that can in no way be related to security requirements or any other public purpose; he has taken advantage of every tax loophole permitted by law—and some of doubtful legality—to diminish his own tax obligations; he has entered into questionable arrangements with his friends to acquire large personal property holdings at minimal cost to himself; he has publicly and emphatically defended one of these friends, C. G. (Bebe) Rebozo, at a time when various Federal agencies were conducting supposedly impartial investigations into his financial affairs.

X. He has attempted to deceive the American people with respect to virtually every particular cited in this Bill of Impeachment, by withholding information and evidence; by misstating the facts when they could no longer be totally suppressed; by constantly changing his version of the facts, so that the people could no longer place any credibility whatever in statements emanating from the Chief Executive of their Government, to the point where it now seems doubtful that he would be believed even if he were to begin, miraculously, to tell the truth.

Cease-fire: Can Peace Be Far Behind?

As this issue of *The Progressive* goes to press, the carnage in the Middle East has been halted—or at least interrupted—by a delicately balanced set of cease-fire terms. It is of the utmost importance that this cease-fire be preserved, and that its patchwork provisions be transformed into a durable peace settlement.

To attain such a settlement will be inordinately difficult, just as achievement of the cease-fire was. But a number of circumstances have combined, in consequence of the latest war, to make the outlook more hopeful than it has been for a quarter of a century.

Chief among these is the recognition, belated but nonetheless welcome, that, as *The New York Times* observed, "neither the Arabs nor the Israelis have the force to impose their will on the other." It is tragic that thousands of lives had to be lost, and precious resources squandered, to bring this lesson home to both sides.

The major powers—the United States and the Soviet Union—whose manipulative intercessions have contributed heavily to the region's constant conflict, also seem to have been sobered by the dangers of enlarged hostilities that were brought to the fore in the recent war, and both appear ready now to assume a more constructive role. And the much maligned United Nations found and executed a useful function, both as a forum for deliberations and as a sponsor for an impartial peace-keeping force.

Finally, there is the dramatic part played by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who has apparently mastered

'THE TRAUMA OF IMPEACHMENT'

Until recently, men and women of restraint and good will generally thought that holding the nation together and pursuing its business were the highest priorities; and that these could best be served if the trauma of impeachment could be avoided. But as sensation has piled upon sensation, and ordinary credulity has been stretched to the breaking point, many of the same people have come to see no way to get on with the nation's business, perhaps not even to hold it together, unless the man at the center of this endless storm is brought to judgment, and removed if necessary. The priorities have not changed, but impeachment now seems less traumatic than the storm itself.

Tom Wicker
in *The New York Times*

It is ludicrous to argue that we will have chaos if we impeach the President; we already have chaos, and worse.

Sidney Lens
in *the National Catholic Reporter*