

Ford should have had a better idea

United States president Gerald Ford recently extended a pardon to former president Richard Nixon for any involvement in Watergate and related crimes which prompted a noisy public protest. THE BRUNSWICKAN must also protest the decision as contrary to the responsibilities of the president who must now lead an important and powerful nation out of a condition of political instability dangerous in times of economic uncertainty.

Apologists for Ford's actions present compelling arguments. It is indeed doubtful the expresident would have received a fair trial. Watergate and related scandals have had perhaps an unmatched impact on public opinion. The findings of the judicial and legislative branches of government and the investigative media have led to such wide-scale innuendos about Nixon's personal morality and role in the scandals it seems unlikely 12 impartial peers could be found to judge him.

In addition there is the consideration the Nixons have undergone overwhelming mental and physical anguish and strain. Further, Nixon has suffered to such a degree Ford should not allow it to continue. This argument is based on the assumption Ford should abide by his Christian morality and conservative reputation, a factor which cannot be overlooked as at least partially responsible for his being approved by the U.S. Senate for vice-president and subsequently president. Finally, Ford has explained his action as in part a measure to "get Watergate behind us" and attempt to recover public confidence in the governmental system.

We cannot, however, support Ford's pardon of Nixon. When facing a period of inflation and economic instability a nation must be politically stable and rule

with the confidence and trust of the electors. This is true especially of a nation which exerts such a powerful influence on world political and economic activity.

Scandals have occurred before and while individuals fell, the system endured. The degree of cover-up and suspicion of betrayal of the public trust which characterizes Watergate, however, would seem to indicate the only way to achieve stability and restore public confidence would be to have an attempt made of discovering the truth or, failing that, to dispel charges made by some of widespread corruption in the system. Ford's attempt to rise above Watergate and forgo judicial investigation into Nixon's involvement would seem to do neither of these.

Preventing the investigation has left the system open to charges of corruption and sealed off one source of information necessary for a re-examination of the presidency, the limits of its power and its place in the U.S. constitution. Some have suggested the pardon was a pre-arranged deal; that Nixon would not have left office unless justice could be compromised. Many such unanswered questions and charges lead to deterioration of the public confidence.

This deterioration is increased when the pardon is granted in such a manner, before conviction or even indictment, that legal authorities and others question whether it is within the spirit of the U.S. constitution. Trust is lost in the system and especially the legitimacy of the presidency. In other words, how democratic is a system where one branch—the presidency—is left with an ill-defined quantity of power all in the hands of one person who has not been chosen by regular election?

A large number of Americans fled their country during the



1960's rather than be forced to engage in combat in Vietnam. The military action was unpopular since its ties to "national security" were unclear. Further, the U.S. had never declared war and had been accused to supporting an undemocratic and corrupt administration. According to David Wise in his "The Politics of Lying," 11,000 troops had been committed to fight in Vietnam a year before the Tonkin Gulf incident (which was used as an excuse by President Lyndon

Johnson to procure Congressional support for a commitment to send troops).

These abuses created a degree of public distrust in the institution known as the U.S. presidency. This degree was increased when speculation arose Ford's recent extension of conditional amnesty to these deserters was merely a prelude to the Nixon pardon. This in turn led to charges of a compromise of justice; of a special justice for those who hold

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