Ford's Nixon pardon attacked

By Barb Moore

Reaction around MIT to President Ford's pardon of former President Richard Nixon ranged from disappointment to outrage.

MIT President Jerome Wiesner typified the usual reaction with the simple statement, "I'm appalled by it..." President Ford announced Sunday morning that he was exercising his constitutional power of pardon to unconditionally forgive Nixon for all federal crimes that he "committed or may have committed or taken part in" during his term as president.

Ford stated that he felt Nixon could not get a fair trial after the publicity caused by the Watergate scandal. He added that bringing the former president to trial would divide the country and undermine the credibility of American institutions.

The most notable effect so far of Ford's announcement is the resignation Sunday afternoon of his press secretary, Jerald F. terHorst. The Associated Press quoted terHorst as saying that he could not "in good conscience" accept the President's action "even though I knew he took that action in good conscience."

At MIT, most comments were not so charitable. Louis Menand, Assistant to the Provost and Lecturer in Political Science, said, "Ford has not kept faith in the American people. This is an insult to the Congress." Menand added that he had written a letter to Senator Birch Bayh (D-Ind.), "the man responsible for anyone involved, since the pardon indicates a strong possibility of guilt."

Professor of Political Science Richard de Sois Powl, said, "Whatever is done should be done equitably for all those involved, not only the president."

Nixon accepted the pardon from his estate in San Clemente, Calif., where he has lived since resigning the presidency on Aug. 9. Nixon said he hoped Ford's action "will contribute to lifting the burden of Watergate from our country."

He added that he could see "clearly now" that he "was wrong in not acting more decisively and more forthrightly in dealing with Watergate."

There are still many questions to be answered as to what Nixon's responsibilities may be concerning Watergate. He can still be called as a witness in the Watergate cover-up trial, assuming the trial will begin as planned. Since he has been pardoned, he cannot take the fifth Amendment to avoid self-incrimination, and must consequently testify in all trials for which he is subpoenaed.

Nixon can still be prosecuted under state law, since the presidential pardon forbids federal prosecution only. He is still responsible for civil suits filed against him.

If he is not convicted of any felony on the state level, he is eligible to run for Federal office again in the future.

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