

Charles McCabe

Himself

Mr. Nixon's Freudian Slip

SINCE I was half-listening, half-doing during the President's State of the Union message, the sentence wasn't quite clear to me. If I had heard what I thought I had heard, it was interesting to say the least.

It took a bit of checking around to get accurately just what the President had said. At one point in his message he urged the Congress to "join me in mounting a new effort to replace the discredited President."

Quickly, Mr. Nixon corrected himself and changed this to "discredited present welfare system."

To amateur psychologists like you know who, however, the damage had been done. Or the good, it may be. We got a sudden uncalled-for look at the troubled innards of our leader. This was the kind of thing they call a Freudian slip, a sudden leap to the tongue of some bit of truth that is so troubling that it insists on coming out. This is the sort of thing cops look for in their interrogations of a suspect — an involuntary confession that is all the more convincing since it is not formal evidence.



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THERE is undoubtedly a part of Mr. Nixon which wishes that he indeed could be replaced. He is, up to now, a man going to pieces before the eyes of the world. He cannot be unaware of this. Since he is a proud man, he certainly cannot enjoy it. That small slip of the tongue may have betrayed that Richard Nixon who would like quietly to fade away into some sheltered cloister where he could lick his considerable wounds.

But it must also increasingly be borne in on the President that he has become a prisoner of his situation. In a real way, he HAS to remain President. To put it brutally, if he is not President there is an

excellent chance that he will go to jail.

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OBSTRUCTION of justice is but one of the many possible charges that may be leveled against Mr. Nixon when he is no longer in the White House, and enjoying the undoubted protection of his office.

The sinister, Polonius-like presences of Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Rebozo are felt by many to contain secrets about the President which are dark indeed. If one or all of them should blow their corks, it could mean the personal end for an unprotected citizen. These lads, on the evidence so far, are ruthless.

We may yet see the wholly unprecedented spectacle of the President of the U.S. engaged in the tawdry process of plea bargaining, as the Vice President did not so long ago. The only way safely to secure the retirement of Mr. Nixon, which at this time certainly seems the most cogent solution for his and the country's problems, would be to guarantee that as a private citizen he would be at least as safe from prosecution as he is as President.

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WERE this done, the beleaguered chief executive could be safe from his fear of his friends. This fear has made so much of his conduct inexplicable. Such as, the reported continuing influence of Mr. Haldeman on White House policy, and the just-short-of-insane erasure of the critical Haldeman-Nixon White House conversation taped a few days after the Watergate break-in.

Is it psychologizing excessively to read into Mr. Nixon's Freudian slip in a message to Congress a deep-seated unconscious longing to be relieved of the intolerable pressures of his situation? I think not. And it might be justice, in the highest sense, to guarantee the President freedom from prosecution of any kind should he resign from office. The poor man has suffered enough.