

Kicking Nixon around one more time

The Nixonian head was back, filling up the TV screen, explaining, expostulating, and putting on his best performance since the Checkers speech 25 years ago. The buildup for the Frost-Nixon conversations had been sudden but cyclonic. The clones at *Time* and *Newsweek* had their blathersome cover stories; the television networks carried who knows how many pseudodispatches which were, in reality, promos for the forthcoming event; the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, both before and afterwards, published argumentative pieces that read more like the nervous rationalizations of regicides than fresh thought or information.

large research staff of anti-Nixon zealots, "I've participated in (sic) all of these broadcasts without a note in front of me. I've done it all from recollection." Or, I'll take you on one-by-one, or in bunches. The SOB is so tough, it's awesome.

They say he suffered cardiac arrest when he came down with his gray phlebitis attack shortly after he'd been chucked out of the White House. Back from the dead and still fighting, Nixon didn't begin to tell his own story until Frost came to him not as a pugnacious prosecutor, but as someone who did genuinely wish to hear his version. The Nixon version, while still mendacious



T. V. Viewers watched Nixon fess up to everything but carnal knowledge of his late dog Checkers.

Short of saying "I committed a felony, I committed an impeachable offense," Nixon admitted about all there was to admit. Other than confessing that he was in on the planning of the Watergate break-in, it would be difficult to imagine anything else concerning the episode that he hadn't shown contrition for. For \$600,000 plus, our ex-president had gone all nude on the telly except for the slenderest of g-strings and two pasties to hide his pubic hair and his self-esteem.

For some Americans that wasn't enough. They wanted Nixon in the dock, *a la* the Moscow trials in the days of Stalin. For them, gulping and tearing up—which he did—wasn't sufficient; they wanted him blubbering and eating the carpet as he implored a stern and avenging people to forgive his satanic self.

For those Americans who could look at Milhouse's swaying jowls and swoop-spatula nose without seeing Beelzebub, the man's performance gave material to reflect on. The mere fact that he was alive was worth a ponder or two. No public figure, not even Joe Stalin, has gotten the universal, unrestrained, and unbroken fusillade of abuse and execration that has been Nixon's since Hideki Tojo and Adolph Hitler packed it in.

But here he was, the man every American schoolchild is being taught to regard as Benedict Arnold II, and he was still fighting like a huge wounded cat when Frost came after him the first half of the program. He even found a little bravado down in the bottom of himself when he told Frost, who was operating with a

perhaps, is plausible and reasonably convincing.

In effect, it is that he was a back-alley, cut-your-gut kind of politician brought up in the presently unpopular lie-cheat-and-steal school of politics. A man who in some ways possessed a near-perfect political judgement, he was completely obtuse in others.

Lyndon Johnson, every bit as dishonest and unbridled in the pursuit of his public and private lusts, understood that when you move into the White House you must cool yourself out and keep the theft, skulduggery, and thuggery a few steps removed from your sacred, presidential person. Nixon could never get it through his head that as president he had to leave off river-ward ethics. He compounded his problem by an excessive loyalty to his henchmen, particularly the badly compromised German shepherds, Haldeman and Erlichman.

In American politics, where no one can state with assurance what the principles of any political party may be, personal loyalty is all. It is the piratical brotherhood of the members of the same marauding gang: one doesn't dump one's buddies lightly. In the telecast Nixon recalled Ike's travail when his closest collaborator, Sherman Adams, got too close to a smarmy Boston businessman. He might have as easily recalled Harry Truman's pal, a blowhard named Harry Vaughn, who functioned as the president's military aide and got caught in a scandal involving the acceptance of gifts such as a deep freeze. Eisenhower fired Adams; Truman wouldn't let go of his boy Vaughn as he learned the truth of the one good *mot* ever attributed to President Warren Gamaliel Harding: "In this job, I am not worried about my enemies. It is my friends that are keeping me awake at night."

In any good pirate gang, even the minor marauders must be

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covered up and protected. That's what Nixon confessed to, and it is very difficult for him to see it as a crime whatever the technicalities of the law books. Of course he understands full well that if you can't provide protection and bring the matter off, you will pay. Macbeth couldn't have said it better: "I brought myself down. I gave them the sword. They stuck it in and they twisted it with relish. And I guess if I'd been in their position, I'd have done the same thing."

In other words, Richard Nixon doesn't regard Watergate as the primary cause, but as an accident, an occurrence that his enemies could use to batter him with. In Nixon's thinking, if his enemies hadn't chanced upon the sword of Watergate, they would have found something else to encompass his ruin.

This isn't a line of inquiry the indefatigable investigative reporters of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have cared to follow. There is ample reason to suppose, however, that these and similar institutions in American society knew of, condoned, and possibly connived in abuses of the civil liberties of politically

unpopular persons that were as serious and more so than the Watergate burglary and bugging.

The persecution of Martin Luther King by the FBI, for example, was common knowledge in the news business by 1964 because the FBI itself came to a number of editors across the country with tapes and transcripts of King's sex life. Moreover, the attacks against King, his Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Socialist Workers Party, and other groups weren't confined to burglary and one bugging, but included countless incidents involving scores of operatives over a span of years.

The reappearance of America's most unlovable face on the TV screen serves only to remind thoughtful people how implausible is the Nixon/devil theory of Watergate. The likelihood is that Richard Nixon was the loser in a struggle that split America's ruling circles over a series of questions which included disarmament, detente, China, and the power of the president and the presidency over the running of the executive branch of government.

ZAIRE

What the CIA is telling President Carter about Zaire

Spearheaded by Moroccan troops, soldiers of Zaire's General Mobutu are making progress in pushing back the guerrilla forces, but so far they have had little success in capturing or killing any. The guerrillas, in fact, have inflicted heavy losses in an ambush, and could be withdrawing into the bush to begin a long-term struggle for power.

Why is the Carter administration so hesitant to push for increased American involvement in Zaire? The following summary of a secret CIA report from Kinshasa provides some answers:

1. While it may be remarkable that Mobutu has been able to stay in power for the past 12 years, this is due to his excessive personality cult, the quasi-barbarous repression practiced by his armed forces, and the corruption of an entire administrative elite. These factors have helped him amass one of the largest fortunes in the world in secret Swiss bank accounts. He certainly possesses sufficient funds to retire and support his family for generations in Europe.

2. There are good reasons to believe that the Lundas, who crossed the Angolan border to reenter their national territory, are warmly welcomed by their tribe in Shaba (formerly the province of Katanga). It appears clear that this is not in fact a matter of the return of "veteran Katangan gendarmes," who have become too old for serious combat. Now the combatants rebelling in Shaba are young, extremely well trained, and determined.

3. The only ability demonstrated until now by the Zairois army of Mobutu has been to flee, despite the considerable arms aid it continues to receive from the United

(This summary was translated from the French biweekly Afrique Asie by Rachel Field and Jon Steinberg.)



Zaire's President Mobutu joining one of his soldiers and a Moroccan in a K-ration meal, courtesy of France, Belgium, or the United States.

States, France, Belgium, and China, and now Morocco. Currently there are high hopes that, with the introduction of Moroccan and French personnel, the Zairois will fight with greater vigor and conviction.

4. It seems essential that Mobutu's army prove, with concrete acts, that it is capable of defending itself and fighting before it will be possible to envisage more resolute action to defend and save Mobutu. It is not yet certain that the forces which the Moroccan army now has in Zaire will be able to assume such a responsibility alone. If, with 60,000 soldiers and gendarmes, the Zairois forces prove incapable of defeating some 3,000-5,000 opponents within a reasonable period of time, then the future of

the Mobutu regime will be quite bleak unless there is another large intervention by African troops. This would mean between 10,000 and 20,000 men with logistic support from the West and in addition, a decision to extend the war into the interior of Angola itself. This in turn could lead to the engagement of Cuban troops to support the Angolan army's defense of its country.

In any case, it is desirable that mediation begin quickly under the auspices of one of the more important African powers—ideally Nigeria—to achieve a viable compromise in the region.

It would also be desirable to weigh the possibility of a compromise between Mobutu and the forces he is fighting.