

ART HOPPE



CREEP Creeps On

DURING the Watergate affair, Mr. Nixon reached his nadir in the polls. And while all his dear friends worried, neither of them should have bothered. For already a powerful organization was at work to repair the damage.

It was called, simply, "The Committee to Re-Erect the President."

CREEP's market survey showed that while Mr. Nixon had always been respected by most and admired by many, nobody had ever liked him very much. Thus the Watergate affair had been particularly damaging to his fragile popularity.

The solution was obvious. The initial step came the very night of his famous Watergate speech. When he'd finished, he wandered into the White House press room unannounced for the first time in history and told startled reporters that they'd been right, he'd been wrong and "I hope you give me hell."

So stunned were the newsmen at this un-Nixon-like display that they failed to grasp its significance. But in the month that followed they began to suspect something was up. For by then, Mr. Nixon had become a familiar sight, lounging feet up on the White House porch in a sweatshirt, sipping beer and waving cheerily to passers-by.

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THIS, of course, was a result of CREEP's analysis that no one really likes a man whose idea of a fun-filled relaxing time is walking on a private beach in shined shoes, white shirt and necktie.

Another problem, CREEP said, was Mr. Nix-

on's weight. People might respect a middle-aged man who hadn't gained a pound in 20 years, but it wasn't likable.

So out went the cottage cheese and catsup. And he was copiously photographed downing pies, hot dogs and blintzes at Coney Island. "Some guys may like Key Biscayne," he told his pick-up team mates after a hot touch football game on the sand, "but give me Coney Island any day."

By July, he'd gained a respectable pot, blue-tinted glasses and hair that just curled over his collar on the rare occasions he wore one. Indeed, he'd become something of an idol to the Nation's youth by renouncing Sunday prayer breakfasts in favor of Mick Jagger rock concerts on the South Lawn. "It sure beats hell out of Billy Graham and Lawrence Welk," he was fond of saying.

Half the country's middle-aged parents came to identify with him when Julie and David Eisenhower were cooperatively arrested in a pot bust. "Great work!" said CREEP.

But it was his new candor and good humor with the press that turned the tide. He'd invite newsmen in for a belt every day after work; light up a cigar and regale them with jokes and tidbits.

"Pat's great," he'd say, "and I never once tried wife-swapping — mainly because the only offer I got was from John Mitchell."

So when a civil war broke out in the Philippines, Mr. Nixon's televised address came as no surprise. "The easy way out would be to ignore the whole thing," he said somberly, "so that's what I'm going to do."

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THUS the Nation came to like Mr. Nixon. And while he could no longer push Congress and the Courts around — not being stern and forceful any more — the country ran just fine.

When the scandal broke in December that CREEP was a devious, slush-funded, corrupt group run by an unemployed advertising man named H.R. Haldeman, the public shrugged.

"Dick Nixon's a really great, likable guy," people said. "And he sure couldn't do anything bad."