

Did Mr. Nixon Overreach?

UNTIL RECENTLY, President Nixon's political performance has been remarkable: He has consistently upstaged, out-classed and put down his flailing Democratic opponents.

He even seems to have worn down the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which has abandoned main force encounters in favor of low-level, protracted warfare. His dream of establishing a Supreme Court with the right conservative philosophy seems about to come true.

MAO WANTS TO see him, Brezhnev wants to see him—my god, even French President Pompidou wants to see him! All in all, he has come on like gangbusters.

However, as the Greeks pointed out, Hubris—overreaching ambition—is the most dangerous political quality, one that inevitably leads to nemesis, defeat. And Mr. Nixon's performance at the AFL-CIO convention suggests that he may have reached the danger point of believing his own press releases.

One can understand how this would happen—the President just isn't used to determined, effective opposition, he is out of practice. So he went to Miami Beach with his usual rabbit gun and found a den of lions.

The President, like his economic advisers, hasn't the foggiest notion how "Phase II" of his Great Economic Program is going to work out.

Suppose the economy doesn't pick up in 1972? What then? Again, one does not have

to be a mind reader to formulate an answer: Set up organized labor as the villain of the piece, get the American people to focus their anger on that Meanie Meany.

For the man who tackled Nikita Khrushchev in the kitchen, the natural scenario would be to stage a confrontation on enemy turf. So we have the President addressing the AFL-CIO convention, bravely venturing into the lion's den, throwing away one prepared speech and delivering another (even better prepared), "straight from the shoulder."

Now Mr. Nixon could pull this one off three times a week with the Democratic policy council, but the difficulty with the AFL-CIO is that it happens to be a real organization. Presidential efforts to divide the rank and file from so-called "labor czars" are bound to fail.

Indeed, Mr. Nixon's sally has merely created a new mood of solidarity in the labor movement, where up to now certain segments have been at least politically neutral.

WITHIN A MONTH or two, most people will have forgotten all about the adventures of Mr. Nixon at the AFL-CIO convention, and predictably George Meany will return to his status as ogre-in-chief of the Democratic left. However, the labor movement won't forget and perhaps President Nixon might recall that the Democratic "Party" which almost beat him in 1968 was, in organizational terms, the labor movement. The President apparently wants a fight—he will get one.