

An Intellectual's View

Presidents as 'Cannibals'

By Michael Harris

Malcolm C. Moos, author of President Eisenhower's celebrated farewell warning against "the military-industrial complex," offered another striking expression yesterday. He said three recent presidents had practiced "cannibalism" on Congress and the Constitution.

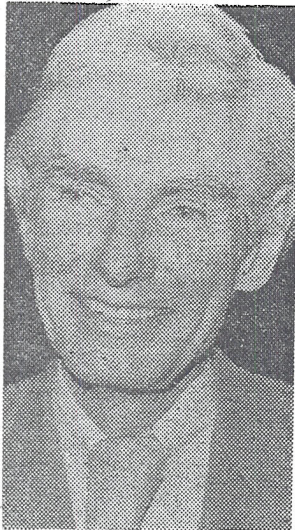
The process continued, Moos said, until it reached the point where "the only term appropriate for the Nixon administration was presidential dictatorship."

Moos, who left government to become president of the University of Minnesota and, since June, head of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara, offered his disturbing analysis at a World Affairs Council luncheon at the Mark Hopkins Hotel.

"The Kennedy administration set the style and established the respectability of the cult of power," Moos said.

Moos did not attack President Kennedy's motives, but he said his actions and those of President Johnson in concealing from Congress the extent of American involvement in Vietnam set the stage for President Nixon.

"The Nixon administration made the first systematic attempt to overcome the handicaps and obstacles to efficient government created by the separation of



MALCOLM MOOS
A harsh analysis

powers," Moos argued.

"If you examine the roster of actions by that administration, it was an effort — conscious or unconscious — to change the presidency... a (new) presidency in which the President, instead of being accountable to Congress or the public, uses both as a shield to legitimize his own decisions."

Moos said the effort to switch from constitutional government to the form of powerful "statecraft" of the Metternich era has persisted since Mr. Nixon's departure from the White House.

"One of the hallmarks of our time," he continued, "is the resurgence of statecraft in a day that finds its symbolic hero in a man like Henry Kissinger who has chosen Metternich as one of his heroes and has announced to the world that statecraft is his profession."

Even with the increased strength of the Democratic opposition, Moos said, Congress is still unable to match the President as an equal in a contest for power.

"Congress is an abstract. The president is one man," Moos said.

"Today the mass media have given the man an opportunity to speak out in a way an abstract cannot. And so in a showdown, public opinion most often can be rallied to the side of the man

in the White House."

It is possible, Moos continued, to make significant changes within the presidency which can leave the office powerful enough to meet great responsibilities while restoring its tradition of responsiveness.

"It is not presidential authority one desires to destroy but presidential power one wishes to constitutionalize," Moos said. "What we must destroy is a capacity in the presidency to be arbitrary and absolute."

"You do not have to weaken the president but recon-

nect him with the rest of the political system."

One way to do this, Moos said, would be for President Ford to continue his innovative practice of appearing before a congressional committee to answer questions.

He did not provide a blueprint for the rest of the job. But Moos said he believed it would be possible, after considerable study and labor, to devise "modern checks and balances that can revitalize the separation of powers ... and return 'statecraft' to the annals of historic absolutism, where it belongs."