

# Mr. Nixon, Past and Present

By David Abrahamsen

At this stage of the impeachment effort it is imperative that we scrutinize President Nixon's own feelings and his past conduct in order to understand his present alleged misbehavior.

It is an axiom that a man's worst enemies are his previous writings and, here, also his tape recordings. In re-reading Mr. Nixon's book, "Six Crises," one finds many clues toward an understanding of his thinking and feelings. One sees and understands how his mind works. Here are some glimpses of the behavior of a tragic man vainly in search of himself.

This beleaguered President has rather successfully delayed the fact-finding investigations by the House Judiciary Committee. The reason for this strategy is obvious. In his book, while mentioning the Alger Hiss case, Mr. Nixon says: "Only the man who was not willing to tell the truth would gain by having additional time to build up his case."

One may ask: Is President Nixon willing to tell the truth?

In line with his pronounced opposition to the Judiciary Committee, his comments on Congressional committees are revealing. Here he spoke of the House Committee on Un-American Activities: "Despite its vulnerabilities, I strongly believed that the Committee served several necessary and vital purposes. Woodrow Wilson once said that congressional investigating committees have three legitimate functions; first, to investigate for the purpose of determining what laws should be enacted; second, to serve as a watchdog on the actions of the executive branch of the government, exposing inefficiency and corruption; third, and in Wilson's view probably most important, to inform the public on great national and international issues."

Now, however, the President does not want the committee to serve as a watchdog nor the public to know about the explosive Watergate issue.

How could it be possible that President Nixon published the transcripts, leaving himself open to serious charges and revealing a vacuum of ethics? He may have thought—and quite unrealistically—that they would not be widely read, for which reason a summary and a legal argument were prepared. Naturally, he expected a favorable reaction instead of receiving a disastrous one. So what went wrong?

One may surmise that he has been living outside the mainstream, out of touch with people's feelings. The reason lies deeper.

Apparently, Mr. Nixon is reliving in glorious memory the successful "Checkers speech" he gave as Vice Presidential nominee in 1952 after being charged with having a secret fund.



In his book he described how he created a situation that "was far from normal" as follows: "I had no choice but to use every possible weapon to assure the success of the broadcast."

The actual events people may not know or remember were that one hour before he was to appear on television he was called by Gov. Thomas E. Dewey who told him that the consensus, including that of General Eisenhower, was that he should resign as Vice Presidential nominee.

"My nerves were frayed to a fine edge by this time and I exploded," he wrote. "Just tell them that I haven't the slightest idea as to what I am going to do and if they want to find out they'd better listen to the broadcast. And tell them I know something about politics too! I slammed the receiver down...."

The rest is history. Mr. Nixon went ahead with his broadcast. Through a speech, in character a public-relations job, he turned defeat into victory—and Dwight D. Eisenhower, the great warrior, who undoubtedly at that time wanted to dump his Vice Presidential nominee, had lost his battle.

More important than giving Mr. Nixon a new lease on the Vice Presidency, this event taught him that by appealing directly to the people he could get his own way. \*

His "Checkers speech" has become emotionally part of his campaign arsenal. It may well be that with the transcripts he hoped to repeat his feat of twenty-two years ago when he had

turned a threatening and humiliating defeat into success. Again this emotional background one can understand Mr. Nixon's almost frantic public-relations travel here and abroad. In attempting to divert people's attention from his desperate personal situation, fundamentally he is reaching back to his past where he once was the master.

This search for mastery and control is further manifested in "Six Crises." In talking with President Kennedy in 1960 when they discussed the Central Intelligence Agency, he said: "It should continue to have primary responsibility for gathering and evaluating intelligence, in which it was doing a good job. But I said it had been my plan, had I been elected, to set up a new and independent organization for carrying out para-military operations."

President Nixon carried in his mind the seed of the "plumbers" for a long time and finally brought it to fruition. Whatever the cost, he had to be the master. He tended to become what I so often have found in human behavior, a person I like to describe as a victimizer, but in the end falling victim to his own victimizing inclinations.

Apparently engulfed in his own feelings, President Nixon's present-day actions reflect his earlier behavior. As in a Greek tragedy he remains a prisoner of his own emotional past.

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\* On "Checkers speech," see WXP 11 May 74, Barry Sussman, filed Watergate.