

Charles McCabe Himself

The Pardon (1) - 26 Sep 74, (2).

THE WORDS came to me as I was getting ready to go to morning Mass in a church just outside Tahoe City. I had turned on the 9 o'clock news in the little cabin I rent during the summer. The flat, nasal voice of the Michigander who was now our President was sending incredible sounds.

"...do grant a full, free and absolute pardon unto Richard Nixon for all offenses against the United States..."

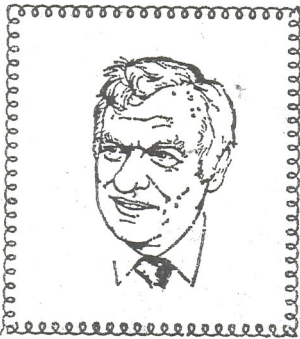
It took some time for the words to sink in. Then the questions crowded: How could you pardon a man if he had not been convicted of something? How did all this square with Mr. Ford's first press conference on August 28? Here he did not rule out

the possibility of a pardon but added:

"There have been no charges made, there has been no action by the courts, there has been no action by any jury, and until any legal process has been undertaken, I think it is unwise and untimely for me to make any commitment."

What could have happened to effect this hasty, foolish and irrevocable action? This was the final Watergate outrage, the ultimate cover-up. It meant we would have Mr. Nixon around forever, protesting his innocence and stirring up trouble. Could the country stand-it?

Later, as I listened to a sermon by the good man with the brogue, the thing began to have a perspective. This was a Nixon operation, pure and simple. A Nixon scenario, to use that hateful White House expression with the words and music acted out by Jerry Ford, who was after all a Nixon appointee.



AND HOW the thing stank of Nixonism! The timing: After Mr. Ford had gone to church; as millions of others were going to church, and as most others were somehow aware, the holiest time of the week for Christians.

Mr. Ford's earlier, and untypical, suggestion of amnesty for draft evaders, took on a sudden murky tinge. The attempt to surround the foregone pardon of a fellow Republican with the odor of sanctity, or the stink of sanctimoniousness, was totally characteristic of the Nixon PR era. After all, Al Haig was still running things in the White House. He was a Nixon man if there ever was one.

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THE PRESIDENT based his pardon largely on the grounds that any move to bring Mr. Nixon to trial would bring many troubled months and even years to the nation.

During that period, he said, "ugly passions would again be aroused, our people would again be polarized in their opinions, and the credibility of our free institutions of government would again be challenged at home and abroad."

That, of course, is precisely what has happened as a result of the pardon. What Mr. Ford thought he could avoid by the pardon has come as a result of it.

When I heard Mr. Ford's pardon speech later, and watched his grim stance before the television cameras, he looked to me like a man with a gun pointed to his back.

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WHAT COULD that gun be? Who was holding it? I have made it a rule in dealing with Mr. Nixon over a quarter century to attribute to him the lowest possible motives compatible with political survival. In using this yardstick, I've seldom been proved wrong. Mr. Nixon's political tactics are almost invariably dirty.

What happened between Mr. Ford's measured statement at his first-press conference and his act of folly on September 8? My theory, for what it is worth, is that Mr. Nixon left office with a taped conversation in which Mr. Ford agreed to pardon him fully.

When Mr. Ford indicated that he favored a measured approach to the pardon issue, there was panic in San Clemente. One way or another, word of the incriminating tape was gotten to Mr. Ford with some form of heavy threat from Mr. Nixon. Hence, the frenzied action which swept Mr. Nixon's guilt under the rug for all time. **More tomorrow.**

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