

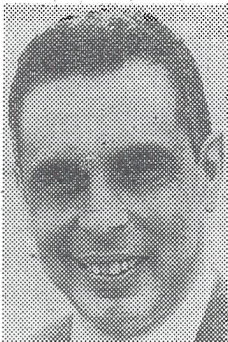
Books of The Times

With Such Friends, Who Needs Enemies?

By CHRISTOPHER LEHMANN-HAUPT

ONE MAN ALONE: RICHARD NIXON. By Ralph de Toledano. 386 pages. Funk & Wagnalls. \$6.95.

EVEN the superficial faults of Ralph de Toledano's new biography are egregious enough to appall his staunchest conservative supporters. The writing is execrable: at best drab and colorless; more often clichéd and attitudinizing; at worst unabashed to stoop to such infelicities as "In politics two strikes is out—and in the gubernatorial election Nixon had not even smelled the ball," or "He had snapped his own swan song at the press in Beverly Hills. . . ." The source material is stale: a cold stew consisting of scraps from de Toledano's earlier books on Nixon, the Hiss case, and espionage in general; quotes from "Six Crises," by Nixon and Alvin Moscow (whose participation de Toledano never acknowledges), and Earl Mazo's biography; and snatches from old conversations with Nixon that have all the intimacy and candor of a press conference.



Ralph de Toledano

Through the Years

The narrative is as flat as a planarian and just as slow-moving. It begins with Nixon's birth, and oozes along through his school years, his Congressional years, his Senate years, his Vice Presidential years, his Presidential-campaign years, his political retirement years, his comeback years, to his election to the Presidency in 1968. We already knew the story by heart.

Even Mr. de Toledano's conservatism is predictable and uninteresting. It never passes beyond the simplistic notion that what is to be conserved in American life is freedom, and that what threatens that freedom is monolithic international Communism.

Worse, his application of those conservative standards to Nixon's career is devious and disingenuous. His ostensible aim is to explode the old Eastern liberal view of

Nixon as an overambitious, opportunistic, red-baiting hatchet man. With his left hand de Toledano tells us it isn't so; with his right hand he tries to prove that even if it is so, everyone that Nixon came up against—Jerry Voorhis, Helen Gahagan Douglas, and Alger Hiss—was worse. Besides, it worked.

But none of the foregoing really matters, or accounts for why "One Man Alone: Richard Nixon" is a bad book—a disservice to Richard Nixon and the cause of political conservatism.

What is so damaging is that Mr. de Toledano takes up Richard Nixon's cause with an air of propriety and protectiveness, calls attention to all Nixon's apparent faults, and proceeds inadvertently to exaggerate them. He gives us the familiar Richard Nixon—the poor Quaker boy, the quintessential advocate of striving and succeeding, the man who is embarrassed by dirty jokes and camaraderie, the compleat square. But he promises an explanation, an insight into Nixon's closeted character.

One Man's Dream

One waits, and as the familiar story unfolds, the mind begins to wander. Maybe they were right—those critics who said that Nixon was an empty vessel, too busy surviving and making it to stop, think, reflect, suffer. He was the American dreaming the nightmare of failure (he was one of those students who moan that they are sure to fail and then stumble out with A's) and boredom (he hated situations where he had to stand still). Was he perhaps "one man alone" simply because he had never arrived at any conception of himself to project to others?

Such thoughts pass through one's head as one awaits de Toledano's synthesis—perhaps a lightning leap to some existentialist insight? maybe a gloss on Norman Mailer's theories on the politician as hero? something, anything, to relate Nixon, and de Toledano himself, to the best of the conservative tradition.

Alas, we wait in vain. And because Mr. de Toledano has no overarching theory, no first-hand knowledge of his "friend" Richard Nixon (or none that he is willing or able to impart to his readers, at any rate) the final effect is to buttress all the worst that has ever been said and thought of his subject.