

The Sullen Emperor

By WILLIAM V. SHANNON

WASHINGTON, Oct. 5—Ten years ago in a state of nervous collapse after his defeat for the California governorship, Richard Nixon vented his deep hostility toward the press.

"Now that all the members of the press are so delighted that I have lost, I'd like to make a statement of my own," he began.

Then for fifteen minutes, he rambled out his rage: "I want that—for once—gentlemen—I would appreciate if you would write what I say. . . . For fifteen years, ever since the Hiss case you've had a lot of fun—a lot of fun. You have had an opportunity to attack me. . . ."

"But as I leave you I want you to know—just think how much you're going to be missing. You won't have Nixon to kick around any more, because, gentlemen, this is my last press conference and it will be one in which I have welcomed the opportunity to test wits with you." The newspapers, he continued, have a responsibility to report all the news and "if they're against a candidate, give him the shaft, but also recognize if they give him the shaft put one lonely reporter on the campaign who will report what the candidate says now and then."

From his hostile comments about the press, one would never guess that Mr. Nixon in his three Presidential campaigns has had the support of about 80 per cent of the nation's newspapers or that, in his unsuccessful race for the California governorship, he had the editorial backing of most of the state's newspapers. No one has ever demonstrated that the news coverage of his various political campaigns was slanted against him.

Mr. Nixon's complaint against the press is different from that of most politicians. Most politicians may disagree with the editorial line of a publisher or have a feud with a particular columnist but, regardless of such disagreements, they usually like to drink and gossip with working reporters.

By contrast, Mr. Nixon has little difficulty with the publishers. It is the reporters he doesn't like. Reporters are natural skeptics. Mr. Nixon approaches public life as if it were a succession of selling jobs. He resents reporters asking questions and raising awkward issues which call attention to the fact that whatever he is merchandising at the moment may not be all that he says it is.

His attitude is very much like that of some corporation executives who deal with the press only through public relations advisers. The White House not only has a press secretary now but also a "Director of Communications" with a staff of public relations men

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much larger than in any previous Administration.

But Mr. Nixon has come as close to abolishing direct contact with reporters as he can. His predecessor saw the press roughly once a week, but Mr. Nixon has had full-scale televised news conferences only about once every three months.

As Roland Evans and Robert Novak observed in their book "Nixon in the White House": "No President ever prepared so diligently for a press conference as Richard Nixon, and he treated each as if it were his first exposure to the naked eye of the camera, with nerves taut as air time neared. He would sit in a cool dark room collecting his thoughts and calming himself but when he entered the press conference, he would often be bathed in sweat."

A news conference is an ordeal for Mr. Nixon because he regards reporters as his personal adversaries. The loathing which he so starkly revealed a decade ago has not abated. There is a natural tension like that between cats and dogs between Government which exercises power and the press which reports, explains, and criticizes the uses of power. Mr. Nixon, an aggressive loner with an overpowering desire to win, has little capacity for self-criticism and cannot abide the critical faculty when exercised by others. What other Presidents have regarded as a sometimes wearisome but essentially good-natured scrimmaging with reporters, Mr. Nixon regards as threatening and persecutory with conspiratorial overtones.

Now in 1972, he has reached the position he has always sought. He campaigns, as one reporter wrote, "like a touring emperor," completely insulated from the press and the people, addressing only selected friendly audiences in halls from which the press is excluded. A view on closed-circuit television is as close as most reporters get to him.

If he is re-elected, the isolation, remoteness and open hostility of the last four years will deepen further in the next four years. This election is the last opportunity anyone will have to remind Mr. Nixon that he is not administering a giant corporation on behalf of a few insiders. He is supposed to be conducting the affairs of a free people.

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Newspapers Back Nixon
668-38 Over McGovern
NYTimes

President Nixon has been endorsed for re-election by 668 daily newspapers while 38 have endorsed Senator George McGovern, according to a survey made by Editor & Publisher, the trade journal of the newspaper industry.

The papers backing the President on their editorial pages have a combined circulation of 17,532,456. Those in favor of Mr. McGovern have a combined circulation of 1,468,223.

Editor & Publisher polled the 1,764 daily newspapers in the United States and 875 responded. Reported as either uncommitted or independent were 169 papers with a total circulation of 3,388,728.

The trade journal will make a final survey, to cover those papers still uncommitted, between now and Election Day.

CORRECTION

Editor & Publisher, the news-media trade weekly, said yesterday it had issued incorrect figures for the number of daily newspapers that had endorsed President Nixon and the number that had responded so far to its survey on endorsements. A total of 548 dailies are backing the President and responses were received from 755; the erroneous figures were issued Thursday and published in The Times yesterday. Senator George McGovern has the support of 38 dailies so far.

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