

Charles McCabe

Himself

The Actor, His Future

ARE WE seeing the end of Mr. Reagan as a public figure, or the beginning; or, in the baleful words of Talleyrand about Napoleon's campaign against the Russians, the beginning of the end? In an unsettled time, in an unsettled country, it is surely hard to tell.

Equally surely, there has never been anything in American political life quite like Ronald Reagan. He is by disposition, previous training, and lifetime predisposition an actor. This means, as with most actors, that he doesn't care much for himself au fond. Otherwise, and indeed, why would a man get up on boards and make a horse's arse of himself before his fellows?



But actors should stay actors. They should be like children and shoemakers. They should be seen and not heard, and they should stick to their lasts. Well, maybe not all actors, but certainly actors like Mr. Reagan. The one who has been playing John Wayne playing governor of California.

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BESIDES not liking himself, the usual actor does not like people. Who is to say that he is not on good ground there? Public excellence, or more public visibility, has a way of vulgarizing both the hero and the fan, at least in this here home of the free and land of the brave.

Before taking office it is to be doubted that Mr. Reagan ever did anybody a political favor in his life. He didn't have to. He by-passed the traditional political elective process completely. He got his smarts in the Screen Actors Guild and the Music Corp. of

America.

Give me the songs of a nation, said Dan'l O'Connell, and I care not who makes it laws. Give me the tube, said dear Ronald, and forget about the rest. Having proved his virtuosity as a telly pitch man, the governor wants to play the Palace, which is to him the White House.

He bears striking similarities to the incumbent thereof. Both men started poor, and sneer at the poor. Both men, given the choice between a humane and an inhumane decision, will opt instinctively for the inhumane one, unless the cost in votes might be so great as to frighten them into decency.

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REAGAN on colleges and universities, on welfare and medical aid to the poor, on aid to the mentally ill, is even to the right of Mr. Nixon. The only man I can think of off-hand that he is left of might be H. L. Hunt, who doesn't think anybody but Texas oilmen, and maybe their lawyers, should be permitted to vote.

As governor, Reagan has shown lofty distaste not only for the ordinary citizen but for the political process as a whole. Again, he never went through it. He figures he doesn't need it, and in this he may be right.

He's got a beady eye firmly fixed on the whole enchilada, as they say in the Southland. When and if he reaches the pinnacle on the Potomac, he will give us the same kind of government there as he gave us in Sacramento. This will be the least possible kind of government for the people, and the most kind of government favorable to businessmen.

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FOR THE ACTOR is besotted by businessmen. Again, like most actors, he is a passive type. He never did any favors for anybody to get where he is. He had favors done for him to get where he is. They were accepted and paid for gratefully. These favors were done by tycoons like Henry Salvatori and his numerous Los Angeles ilk.

Reagan had better believe in businessmen. They made him what he is today by hiring his talents as a spellbinder. The Guv could sell opium to an Anglican bishop. That, in fact, is what he has been doing to old Pro Bono Public in this state for more than eight years. I cannot think of an administration into which the Messrs. Haldeman, Ehrlichman and Ziegler et al. would fit more snugly than that of Mr. Reagan. I include that of the incumbent. In addition, Reagan will be even more publicly pious than the pre-expletive Nixon. Happy days.