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Himself

TV Retries Watergate

DURING the parlous days of 1974 there was a lot of talk in high Republican circles about "putting Watergate behind us." This was the high moral line taken by Mr. Ford when he awarded his infamous pardon to the No. 1 villain in the whole piece, Mr. Nixon. And of course it was the line repeatedly mouthed by Mr. Nixon himself.

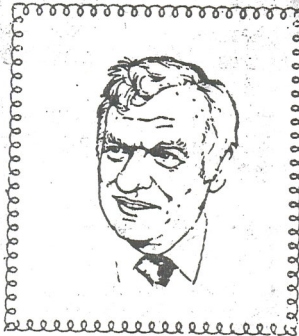
At that time "putting Watergate behind" was not what you could call a good idea, since many of the participants were in jail and the others were *sub judice*. With the sentencing of the Messrs. Haldeman, Mitchell and Ehrlichman, however, getting the thing behind us was a very good idea indeed.

But you wouldn't say that if you were in show business, and if you could sell stuff for sweaty armpits by political necrophilia. This is exactly what the networks, and especially CBS, are doing now.

First we had G. Gordon Liddy, the chief burglar, telling all to Mike Wallace for a reported \$15,000. Next we had H.R. Haldeman telling all to the same fellow, and patronizing Mr. Nixon to boot, for a reported \$50,000 for two hour-long programs. And now, by the Holy, we have Mr. Nixon himself reportedly "restraining" some of his backers from approaching the networks so that good man can once again bedevil us on the tube.

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THE HALDEMAN interviews were inexcusable. It is not so much that the network should not have bought news. That is bad enough. But that the network should have allowed a convicted felon to perform a snow job on the American people that



combined a bit of artful plea-bargaining, character rehabilitation, and outright manipulation of the public, is a shoddy thing indeed.

Haldeman was questioned by a man known as "a fearless and dogged interrogator." Actually, Wallace's sneering and outright rudeness did much to make Haldeman look like Mr. Good, which was the object of the exercise, of course. Good show biz, bad show.

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THE FACT that Mr. Nixon is reported holding back his friends from arranging a television program for him is proof sufficient for me that Mr. Nixon will soon be before us again, in all his smarmy glory.

Negotiations for a "Nixon Special" started early this year. A former White House aide has said: "Although the matter is now at a standstill, in accordance with Mr. Nixon's wishes, he has a standing offer of approximately \$250,000 from one independent program producer who is prepared to go ahead whenever Mr. Nixon is agreeable, and there is solid interest in other quarters." The source of the reported offer was not identified.

Active in approaching the networks, by their own admission, have been Paul Presley, San Clemente motel owner and Nixon neighbor, and Rabbi Baruch Korff, who heads the money-raising Nixon Justice Fund.

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MR. PRESLEY and Rabbi Korff have made it clear to the networks that the "Nixon Special" would be an outright apotheosis. To be acceptable, any network proposal would have to be a "historical documentary" spanning the five and a half years of Nixon rule and not merely what Mr. Presley referred to as "A Watergate inquisition on the air." All questions about Watergate would have to be subject to Mr. Nixon's approval to insure, said Mr. Presley, "A properly balanced program."

When this infamous proposal is accepted and acted upon, as it certainly will be, the guilty network will in effect be subsidizing one of the great liars of history, all in the interest of soap and soup sales. I hope that network president will be able to look at himself in the mirror the morning after the "Nixon Special" is inflicted on us.