

After a Year in Exile, Nixon Is Taking An Active Interest in the Politics of '76

By EVERETT R. HOLLES

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Aug. 8 — A year after the scandals of Watergate drove him to resign the Presidency, Richard M. Nixon is emerging from the trauma of that ordeal and, according to associates, is taking an active interest in Republican party politics.

The exile of San Clemente was said by several friends who see him frequently to be spending hours on the telephone "talking 1976 politics" with persons of influence in Republican affairs, urging upon them the necessity of keeping the party united behind President Ford's election.

"He is deeply concerned about the challenges from the right to Mr. Ford's leadership," said one friend, "especially efforts by Ronald Reagan and a few others to mobilize Republican conservatives, even though He is confident those opponents cannot possibly succeed in casting the President aside."

"He feels strongly, nevertheless, that any right-wing revolt centering largely upon foreign policies which President Ford inherited from him, and has generally kept intact, would not only be a gift to the Democrats but would turn the party back toward obsolete and dangerous isolationism with serious consequences for the nation and the cause of world peace."

In what the friends described as Mr. Nixon's "discreet" advice to Republican leaders around the country, he was said to have urged that firm steps be taken—in just what manner was not made clear—to curb the growing conservative criticism of his successor.

Talks with Ford

Among those to whom Mr. Nixon is reported to have stressed his concern are members of Congress and the Ford Administration, and some of the Republican party's most generous financial supporters.

At least one of his telephone calls, according to a Nixon confidant, went to Howard H. Callaway, whom he appointed Secretary of the Army and who is now Mr. Ford's 1976 campaign manager. Other calls went to such party leaders in Congress as Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania and John J. Rhodes of Arizona.

Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona who has visited the Nixons' Casa Pacifica and discussed Mr. Nixon's political future with him, has since received several telephone calls, as have Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina and California's Republican state chairman Paul Haerle, according to sources close to events at the Nixon home.

A San Clemente friend said that Mr. Nixon had talked with President Ford at least six times recently about "political and other matters," although Mr. Ford has initiated only one call to his predecessor—on his 62d birthday last Jan. 9.

More frequent and more political have been Mr. Nixon's calls to Secretary of State Kissinger.

Mr. Nixon also was said to be concerned over criticism of President Ford's recent trip to the European Security Conference in Helsinki, Finland, which in the former President's view, was an essential sequel to his own policy of detent with the Soviet Union.

'Rejuvenated and Impatient'

The former President, who resigned Aug. 9, 1944, was described this week by a member of his stripped-down staff as "a rejuvenated and impatient man," if not yet fully recovered from last November's blood clot surgery.

The staff member described the former President as feeling that after 12 months, "the emotionalism is fast draining out of Watergate," giving way to new concerns over the economy, the energy crisis and other issues.

He was said to feel that public rancor toward him had given way to a more temperate attitude, and that the American people were coming more and more to look upon him as a man who may have made serious errors of judgment but who did his best in the national interest.

Others, however, who have talked to Mr. Nixon recently feel that while he is less given to brooding, he still is "out of touch with reality."

The renewal of Mr. Nixon's spirits and confidence, and his talk about embarking on a new career of public service as well as an "exploratory" trip to Europe, possibly next year, appear to be based partly on nearly two million letters he has received in the last year,

95 per cent of which were said to carry messages of "sympathy, respect and gratitude."

'Remarkably Improved'

Seven months ago, a group of about 40 friends and associates arranged a birthday party for him at the San Clemente Inn. Several of those who attended later referred to the former President as "a beaten man."

Now, he is making a steady recovery in body and spirit, according to his friend and neighbor, Paul Presley, although his illness has left its marks—a slight stoop, more gray hair, the trace of a frown above his sunken cheeks and more flaccid jowels.

"But he is remarkably improved, more cheerful and more alert and his limp is rarely noticeable," Mr. Presley said.

Because of a bland, low-cholesterol diet, his weight is down from a normal 164 pounds to about 155 pounds.

Sitting with a visitor around his swimming pool two weeks ago, Mr. Nixon said:

"I'm 90 per cent as good as new now."

He plays golf once or twice a week, sleeps soundly, and works five or six hours a day, mostly on his memoirs.

Like the former White House compound on the adjoining grounds of the Coast Guard Loran Station, where many of the modular structures of the Presidential complex have disappeared and the helicopter pad has become a handball court, Casa Pacifica has lost its trim, manicured appearance.

With only one gardener left from a staff of five, portions of the lawn are yellowed and spiked with weeds.

Until the resignation, the Nixons were surrounded by a staff and service personnel totaling 26 persons. Today there are nine.

Neither Mr. or Mrs. Nixon is ever seen on El Camino Real, the main shopping street in this coastal resort city of 20,000 and, except for Mr. Presley, who owns the San Clemente Inn and lives a stone's throw away from the Nixons, they have no close friends in the town.