

Charles McCabe

Himself

'The Old Nixon'

EARLY IN JULY the Associated Press reported a telephone call between Richard Nixon and one of his old political cronies, Harry Dent.

"In reference to Watergate, Mr. Dent said, Mr. Nixon told him that in his heavy involvement with the problems in Vietnam and in his quest for world peace, 'he let some things slip past him.'

"Mr. Dent added that his caller 'sounded like the old Nixon.' "

He sure did.

None of us ever really suspected that when Mr. Nixon stepped down from the presidency he was walking into a quiet, respectable private life. That was not the nature of the man. He has had only one real job in his life, political dealing. As he too often has reminded us, he is not a quitter.

But the recent barrage of flackery from San Clemente, wherein we are caught up with a man champing at the bit to return to public life, makes it only too clear that The Great American Nightmare is going to be with us once again.

It is said by those closest to him that Mr. Nixon will not speak out in a "major" public way until after the 1976 presidential election. This, according to these close sources, is partly to avoid hurting the Republican party's chances, and partly to keep an air of mystery surrounding the publication of his memoirs.

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"SOURCES close to Mr. Nixon" have been wrong before, and they will be wrong again. There is no way in which a healthy Mr.



Nixon can keep his political fingers out of the pie. In his case this means running for office, or seeking a fat appointment.

Already the ex-President is criticizing the man who succeeded him and granted him a pardon for all his political sins. In that same A.P. interview he told Harry Dent: "South Vietnam would not have gone down the drain if I hadn't had my problem."

This is quite a statement. Mr. Nixon is blaming the Congress, the Supreme Court, and the American people — the Watergate forces that brought about his removal from office — for the failure of our ruinous adventure in Vietnam.

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THE MEDIA STANCE of Mr. Nixon is that of a statesman who is at the moment engaged in a vacation from public life. He is still using federal funds to keep his name before the public, and objecting because he isn't getting enough of such funds.

Mr. Nixon's political savior, President Ford, recommended to Congress a sum of \$203,000 for office and staff expenses in the coming year. These monies would be spent largely to take care of consolatory mail the ex-President received since leaving office. Congress, dubious that public money should be spent on an effort at self-promotion, cut the figure to \$150,000. Congress should have been more dubious.

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MR. NIXON'S political resurrection, or attempted same, is sure to be painful to the American psyche. This, like many another fact connected with his downfall, is apparently lost on Mr. Nixon. He has the true sociopath's conviction that he never had done wrong, no matter what his "enemies" assert.

"He views his situation in terms of politics, not in terms of law," explains a Nixon friend quoted in *Time*. "In the book (his memoirs) he will write himself into history as a victim. He is not capable of thinking of himself as one who committed crimes."

Nothing, however, will expunge the fact that Mr. Nixon accepted, and perhaps even manipulated, a Presidential pardon while under heavy legal and political fire. This alone should have removed Mr. Nixon from even aspiring to the role of Elder statesman. But, as the Duke of Wellington said in another connection, if you can believe that, you can believe anything.