

Charles McCabe

Himself

Nixon As King

AS EACH MONTH passes it becomes clearer what a glorious favor the United States did for themselves by excreting Mr. Nixon from the body politic.

Yet the man just won't go away. People ask me continuously why I continue to write about, or to harp on, the man and his perfidies. My answer is that nothing would please me more than to have Nixon removed permanently from my attention; but this the exile in San Clemente will not permit, nor apparently will his *eminence grise* and companion in prayer Henry Kissinger.

His pertinacity in drawing attention to himself is not without its occasional reward, however. The other day he gave as pointed a clue as you could ask for, if you were interested in his conduct and the cause of his fall. The clue was at once a Freudian slip, the product of much deliberate and solitary thinking, and a revelation of how completely Nixon always misunderstood what America is all about.

He gave, as you will recall, a sworn deposition to the Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence, about his presidential role in authorizing peace time wiretaps. In it resides the astonishing clue. Offered, mark you, by the man himself through his lawyers:

"It is quite obvious that there are certain inherently governmental actions which, if undertaken by the sovereign in protection of the interest of the nation's security, are lawful but which, if undertaken by private persons, are not."

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THERE you have it. Nixon sees himself, nearly



two years after his resignation, as the deposed "sovereign" of the United States. There have doubtless been Presidents who entertained this same *folie de grandeur* at one time or another; but none ever identified himself in kingly fashion, and certainly not in a considered and even ponderous fashion.

Many people have said that Nixon thought himself above the law. Now Nixon himself has said it. The history of our United States, the deliberations of the constitutional conventions, the ragged struggles for the maintenance of our liberties, and above all our constant retreat from the idea of monarchy, appear to have been completely lost on the man from Whittier.

It figures.

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THE WHOLE PURPOSE of this country was to make certain that kings would never have anything to do with its governance, and that, above all, we would never place at our head a man who entertained the idea that he was sovereign, in so much as the slightest particular.

If he is allowed to be sovereign in one slightest particular, especially in a penumbral area like "national security," there is no preventing him from extending that security umbrella over any action he sees fit. It almost came to that, in the case of Nixon, until his Hubris began to show.

The last thing in the mind of the framers of the Constitution was that they were enthroning anybody. Gouverneur Morris, one of the framers, was explicit: "This magistrate is not the king . . . the people are the king."

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IF NIXON ever knew this, he certainly forgot it in the flush of power. Once you accept the idea that a man thinks he is above the law, and admits it, certain things about Watergate become clearer. One of these things is the great psychological mystery of the whole thing: Why didn't the man destroy the tapes that were sure to destroy him.

Short of outright madness, the only excuse for such a course is that the man truly believed in his bones that he could do no wrong because he was king of America as surely as Louis XIV had been King of France. Because he was king, he could do no wrong. Ultimately, no matter how badly things looked at the minute, his position would be retrieved, as the position of all kings are, unless they are beheaded or exiled. The king was wrong. It was a mighty good thing for his "kingdom" that he was.