



The Nixon Pardon

— Andrew Tully

THERE'S nothing new in Jimmy Carter's campaign against the Nixon pardon. Andrew Jackson's opponents used to insist piously that they didn't believe Mrs. Jackson played around.

Carter's approach is different and yet gets the job done. He keeps telling reporters he won't make an issue of the pardon. In some quarters, that's totally effective in making it an issue.

And, of course, President Ford's forgiveness of Richard Nixon has its place in the campaign, simply because a lot of people believe Mr. Ford should have left Nixon to the mercy of the same official system that deals with embezzlers and muggers. That is to say, anything that has provoked controversy is, *per se*, an issue.

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CARTER is dumb like John Kennedy was dumb in his repeated disavowal of those in his camp who called Nixon "Tricky Dick" — as Kennedy put it, "because of some of Mr. Nixon's political practices." The suggestion was that while Kennedy disapproved of Nixon's style, he wouldn't stoop to calling his opponent names.

Carter lets the media raise the pardon question. That gives him a swell opportunity to discuss it. First, as he told a gaggle of Washington reporters, he says it would be "unfair" to make the pardon an issue. Then, when reminded of Fritz Mondale's denunciation of the

pardon at the Democratic Convention, he says: "The issue is there. The American people know who pardoned Nixon. They have their doubts about what Mr. Ford did."

It is hard to blame Carter. He is, after all, running in a hardball league, and keeping any questionable act of the Republican administration alive is imperative. He does not denounce the pardon out of hand but says he would have let the judicial process run its course with Nixon before considering a pardon.

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ARE HIS tactics sly and cunning? Of course they are. But they are also legitimate in a presidential campaign. You use the weapons at hand, even if — in some cases — they must be used in a furtive fashion.

And don't kid yourself. Carter won't let the pardon issue die. He says it would be politically unwise to "try to castigate Mr. Ford because he pardoned Nixon." So he doesn't castigate Ford; he simply acknowledges the existence of the issue.

Well, that's big-time politics. What Carter has been saying is that he'll let Mondale and others on his team kick the pardon around to see what the voter reaction will be. If that reaction is negative, he'll call off his troops or order that the pardon be mentioned only in response to media inquiries.