

THE NEW REPUBLIC

Calling All Delegates

Four weeks remain, four weeks during which delegates to the Democratic national convention can think earnestly about the leaders and policies to best serve the party and the country, four weeks also in which citizens who are not delegates can tell their precinct captains, their county and state chairmen, their local candidates and emissaries to Chicago what they want, and why. By an early July Associated Press count, Hubert Humphrey had 711 pledged delegate votes, McCarthy 415, and various favorite sons 563. Thus, the question of who the nominee will be is open. Once preliminary fights over credentials have been settled, the convention too promises to be as open as most have been. One may assume an openmindedness on the part of at least a substantial number of the 753 still uncommitted delegates. Theirs is the power and the opportunity to make the Democratic Party once again the party of the future. It is a critical choice, for the smell of 1860 is in the air. As in the pre-Civil War period, the American political system may not be able to withstand strains put upon it. One can foresee the (Continued)

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possibility that our major parties may again be incapable of containing violent pressures from below, that the government elected in November may be impotent and our internal conflicts irreconcilable. It has happened before. Responsible citizens in 1968 cannot whistle a happy tune and pretend that once the conventions have picked their candidates and the election had been held, the air will be cleared and we can all breathe easily. Too many consciences have been seared by the agency of Vietnam for that; too many blacks, too many poor, too many of the young have lost faith in the readiness of the establishment to render justice. Who can fail to sense the doom impending if the new Administration lacks *their* confidence?

Some men can. They are determined to prove it by nominating Hubert Humphrey. Like their pre-Civil War predecessors in a time of comparable tensions, they believe that adroit manipulation will keep the lid from blowing off. To make Humphrey President, they are gambling on an anti-democratic strategy; anti-democratic, because it subverts the electoral system, defies the popular will, and violates canons of political responsibility. If they succeed in the short run, the nation will suffer in the longer run.

The editors of this journal are among those who have applauded Hubert Humphrey's energetic and good-humored championship of the underdog for over two decades. We do not gladly turn against him now. If the clock could be turned back, we would turn it back. It can't be done. The Vice President is trapped in a desperate situation for which he is only partly responsible. But he is trapped. He could break out of it, but only by following Lyndon Johnson, removing himself from the race and turning his party free. He would do credit to himself were he to do so. And in so doing, he would reject the strategy of men too reckless or too insensitive to recognize the political crisis they are precipitating.

Since 1965, when Mr. Humphrey became Vice President, he has proudly affirmed his leading role in the "Johnson-Humphrey Administration" (his phrase). It is a matter of fact, not opinion, that he is, as the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* noted, "equally responsible with President Johnson for having gone to the American people in 1964 on a peace platform and then, immediately after the election, plunging them into a war which was being planned at the very moment the promises of peace were being made." It is this record, the *Post-Dispatch* said, "which has led to such a degree of public revulsion against the Administration that the President dares not run for reelection, and can no

longer even communicate with the people. It is this record which cannot be expunged by an embarrassed Vice Presidential silence." That same point was put in a different way last week by Walter Lippmann: "The suddenness and the explosive enthusiasm of Humphrey's propaganda was breathtaking, equaled only by its naïveté and unworldliness. He exclaimed, for example, that there was 'a tremendous opening here for realizing the dream of the Great Society in the great area of Asia, not just here at home.' . . . A man who can believe that he can construct the Great Society in Asia, assuming blithely that it is just about to be constructed at home, is something to worry about if he ever reaches the White House."

In midsummer, 1968, the credit rating of the Johnson-Humphrey Administration was near bottom—as low as that of the pro-slavery Buchanan Administration which, by midsummer 1860, had fatally inflamed social and moral conflicts and fragmented political parties. The fires burning in the hamlets of Vietnam and in the ghettos of our cities illuminate a face of America we would rather not see. The Vice President's complicity is inescapable; that is his tragedy. But it would be more tragic if the Democratic convention made believe that things aren't so bad after all, if the delegates refused to pass judgment on what has been done, and left undone. The way has been prepared; the convention has been signaled; it does not deliberate in ignorance of the issues or of the mood of the people.

From March 12 to June 18, from New Hampshire to California and back again to New York, in the manner provided by law and custom for the popular will to express itself, Senator McCarthy and the late Robert Kennedy directly challenged their party's leadership. No sophistry can befog the results. In an avalanche of primary defeats, unprecedented in the experience of an incumbent Administration, the Johnson-Humphrey forces were overwhelmingly repudiated by millions of adults who actively fulfilled their civic responsibilities and who, therefore, can rightfully demand respect. Most notably, the Administration has been repudiated by hundreds of thousands of our brightest, most idealistic, most responsible young people. They are not to be dealt with cynically. They have revived hopes, and not just within the United States, that unlike 1860-61, the American political system today has the vitality to make itself over, and in so doing to restore the people's confidence in themselves and in the democratic process.

The volunteers, many of them participating in politics for the first time, have done their duty. It remains for the Vice President to properly value their work, to accept their judgment as he has honestly accepted responsibility for the present Administration. He should not balk at the penalty our political system imposes upon governors from whom the governed have withdrawn consent. The Administration, all of it, has lost any claim to the public's allegiance, and it would be a high demonstration of patriotism, as well as realism, were the Vice President to acknowledge that, and act accordingly. He would not then lend himself to a strategy of political blackmail calculated to win from delegates in Chicago what he and Lyndon Johnson could not win these past months at the polls.

Blackmail is a harsh word; it is used deliberately.

Who constitutes the coalition working for Mr. Humphrey's nomination? Does anyone doubt that Lyndon Johnson is the boss wrangler? On March 31, the President accepted personal defeat as the price for salvaging his policies. Then and there, the Vice President became the instrument by which history was to absolve and vindicate Mr. Johnson. By taking himself out, Mr. Johnson gained a certain immunity from censure. His policies, however, have not been withdrawn from the election, and the Vice President has not been an uninterested party to those policies. Nor does it escape public notice that Mr. Johnson continues to exercise the power of the Presidency to assure a continuity congenial to his Administration.

Aside from Lyndon Johnson, among the groups bent on whipping through the nomination of Hubert Humphrey, the Southern Bourbons lead the pack. His nomination depends upon a solid bloc of Southern and border delegations, some of which are chosen in direct violation of the equal rights of Negro citizens. Southern racists form the bedrock support, which seems unbecoming, since Mr. Humphrey once fought bravely to strip these same people of their traditional power to dominate the Democratic Party. But the paradox is no paradox. For the 1948 model Hubert Humphrey is not the 1968 model. He has, God help the English language, "matured," and Southern racists know how "maturity" is defined. It is a happy stroll arm in arm with Lester Maddox of Georgia and public praise of him as "a good Democrat."

After Lyndon Johnson and the Southern Bourbons come relics left over from the Tweed Ring and the Gilded Age, the local errand boys of the party. Simultaneously contemptuous and frightened of "amateurs," only mildly aware of the requisites of a workable political system, barely capable of rising above a ward-heeler mentality, they raid state conventions and committee meetings to deliver blocs of sheepish delegates to the Chicago stockyards. Their weakness, and they

sense it, is their inability to deliver large blocs of voters during the primaries in such states as Connecticut, Pennsylvania and New York. If, in Chicago, they cannot bottle up the democratic impulse uncorked by Senators McCarthy and Kennedy, they fear they will be knocked off their perch, small as it may be. And they are right. That is why they panic. That is why they commit delegate robbery in broad daylight in New York, Connecticut, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Alabama, Washington, and elsewhere.

Ranking below the "pols," not in ardor for the Humphrey cause but in the number of delegates they hope to deliver, come the ossified trade union executives - men like George Meany, who have transformed the labor movement from an inspiring force for social justice into a baronial club. Mr. Humphrey is "their boy." When they call, he will come to their conventions. He will hail them as "great statesmen of labor." Meanwhile, a huge underclass is kept down, in part because of the racist policies, the self-protecting insularity of the labor bureaucrats.

To slap together the majority they need, the managers of Mr. Humphrey have had to raise millions of dollars, and those dollars have been collected by an assortment of investment bankers, government contractors, franchise operators, entrepreneurs and rich men, and would-be entrepreneurs and rich men. Sidney Weinberg, "Mr. Wall Street himself," publicly announced that he would do the job. He did, at a "millionaire's lunch" at Le Pavillon in New York. These men too now, at long last, appreciate Mr. Humphrey's "maturity."

The list could be extended. The central question, however, is not who makes up the coalition around the Vice President. It is: Given the political revolution manifest in the spring of 1968, how do they hope to get away with it? How do they expect to ram through the nomination of Humphrey in the summer and not wreck the Democratic Party in the fall? How do they hope to do it without imperiling Democratic congressional candidates, whose election is essential if we are to have a modern, responsive government during the next two years? The answer of the Humphrey managers to all such questions is: Richard Nixon. That is how they hope to get away with it. That is why their strategy is justifiably characterized as "political blackmail." They calculate that, confronted by the alternative of Nixon, only a handful of Democrats and Independents will fail to fall in line. They're sure that by the time November rolls around and the threat of Nixon (or Wallace) looms more menacing, few in the ghettos or the universities, few of the thousands who campaigned for McCarthy or Kennedy, will dare denounce the Humphrey nomina-

tion as a subversion of democracy. Kick and scream at first, privately curse later, they will. But choose the *greater evil*, let Nixon win, no, not American liberals.

That is the strategy. Do what has to be done in the stockyards of Chicago. And act tough, like real political pros know how – and soft-headed liberals or just plain fed-up voters do not. That is how Lyndon Johnson and company will be raised from the living dead. That is how they believe they can renew their lease on the White House.

But suppose Mr. Humphrey is nominated but does not win? What have his backers then gained by nominating him? Their answer is: a far better chance to retain their hold on what is left of the Democratic Party.

The rest of us, however, are free to be indifferent to such interests. We are thus free in the coming weeks to address a quite different message to the convention delegates: the nomination of Mr. Humphrey is a prelude to defeat; even should he win, his Administration will not have moral authority or political force required to turn the American government around, as it must be turned around to secure internal and external peace. By the very act of "winning," Mr. Humphrey would gravely increase the likelihood of unpredictable and uncontrollable shocks which could shatter our system beyond repair. At a minimum level, if the torrent of civil energy and idealism that flooded the country this spring is dammed up, if the political system responds to this crisis by permitting the people to "choose" only between endorsing the Johnson-Humphrey Administration or Richard Nixon, legions will turn away in disgust. They will drop out. Or they will turn to the politics of violent confrontation. Given the nominations of Humphrey, Nixon and Wallace (bearing in mind last summer's riots here and this summer's near revolution in France), no one can rule out the possibility of insurrection in the universities and the ghettos. And contrary to the visions of romantics who look forward to such rebellions as dirty means to noble ends, the violence will provoke a right-wing reaction that could make de Gaulle's authoritarian regime appear the embodiment of Mill's essay on civil liberty. If Mr. Humphrey is nominated in August, it will be extremely difficult to effectively counter the arguments of those who contend in September. that

the politics of confrontation is the only way left to resist a system that has proved its corruption in Vietnam. Many of us will try to counter that argument. But we will fear for the Republic.

There is no consensus yet on what people who demand change will do if Mr. Humphrey is the candidate. Many will boycott the election. Others will vote for Nixon as a way of registering their disapproval of the present Administration. Still others will support a national third or fourth party. But they will not vote for Mr. Humphrey, feeling that if they did, they would become his accomplices. And as his accomplices, they would forfeit any power they might have to counter the arguments of those who advocate violence as the only practical strategy for redeeming society.

We do not expect Humphrey to do it, but it must nonetheless be said again that he should bow out – and for one additional, more partisan reason which has been scarcely mentioned. There is a very large company of Independents and Republicans who also yearn to be rescued from a disagreeable choice between Nixon, Wallace, Humphrey, or abstention. Senator McCarthy has won the trust of many of them. They like his composure. They are impressed by the fact that he is a model for the young. They see in him a conciliator, never overstating his credentials nor his goals, but never understating the gravity of the country's peril. Their support in November could be decisive, not only in the presidential contest but in the campaigns of lesser Democratic candidates all down the line for whom a winner at the top of the ticket is essential.

What will the delegates do? That depends in part on what others do between now and August 26. Delegates can be spoken to, written to. They can be urged to be true to their best instincts and to the warnings of past history. Having done that, they can go to the country confidently, in the spirit of John F. Kennedy's inaugural address: "Now the trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need – not as a call to battle – though embattled we are – but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, 'rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation' – a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself."

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