



## WHO REALLY LOST THE ELECTION?

by bo burlingham

IT WAS AN ILL WIND NAMED NIXON that blew across the land on November 7, leaving behind it the wreckage of lingering dreams that, at heart, we Americans are a compassionate people. In the long run, such a wind can bring no one any good, but ironically it may have helped to dispel some of the smoggy illusions we have harbored about this country.

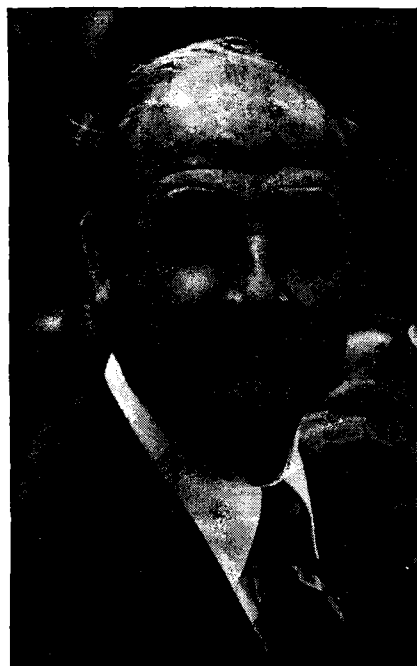
In the initial post-mortems, most of the pundits have concentrated on the electorate's negative reaction to McGovern and his program. Few have pointed out the other side of the coin: that more than 60 percent of the voters cast their ballots for racism, criminality in government, a draconian approach to social malaise, and a continued global imperialism. The sensibilities of Americans—stretched to their limits in the 1960s—have now snapped back with a mean and reactionary vengeance. And so we face four more years, which only increases the need for a disloyal opposition.

There were lessons in the returns. The election did offer a choice to the country. Nixon at his best and McGovern at his worst still posed fundamentally different agendas for America—the one repressive, corrupt, and lily-white; the other experimental, essentially peaceful and open to all races. McGovern's was a program of the 1960s—the vision of a more compassionate country matured in Nixon's exile. But the program came forward too late. The country was in no mood for it, no longer had even the flicker-

ing sense of guilt that might once have made it listen. McGovern's mistake was to take the occasional idealism of the past decade more seriously than he should have. He didn't realize that Americans are tired of talking crisis.

Nixon's genius was to allow space for America's fantasies about itself to develop. He presents the promise of an America of the 1950s—a fat country peacefully chewing its cud, a nation where the young don't drop out, where the poor suffer with becoming silence and anyone can grow up to be President; a strong country whose terrible swift sword is feared by other nations. His response to the 1960s was a simple one—to pretend that it had all been a bad dream and to turn back the clock by a sheer act of will. It was apparently what people wanted to hear.

In the end, the specific issues of the campaign didn't count for much. An analysis of pre-election polls shows the extent and depth of the neurosis sweeping America. According to the *Time*/Yankelovich poll of October 2, for example, the electorate viewed Nixon by significant margins as "the real



peace candidate," the true friend of "the little man," and the candidate "most likely to have an open and trustworthy Administration." Incredibly, 42 percent saw Nixon as best able to deal with minorities, against 31 percent for McGovern. Even *Time* was moved to comment, "This makes little empirical sense."

The results do not, in fact, make any sense at all. If the campaign and its attendant scandals proved nothing else, they showed the Administration racked with corruption, back scratching, and deals made with big business at the expense of the "little man." For Americans to turn their backs on this sordid drama amounted to a pathological act. It was a turning away from the rational principles that ought to determine what political interests are. It was a signal that people are now of a mind to deal on a more subliminal level—through the code that Nixon, more than any other contemporary politician, has mastered: law and order, quality education, peace with honor.

In some sense, racism lay at the bottom of the election returns, although it was scarcely mentioned in the campaign. It imbued the Nixon campaign effort, as witnessed by a memo prepared by a Spanish-speaking member of the Committee to Re-elect the President. According to the report in the *New York Times* (November 4, 1972), the memo described New York City's Puerto Ricans as "an uneducated, apolitical audience addicted to media" which "could be drenched with simple slogans" and thereby be turned against McGovern.

The latter, significantly, never saw fit to raise the question of racism. His game plan instead called for "appeals to the best instincts of Americans" without confronting their worst ones. In fact, the McGovern campaign was built on an illusion of the essential goodness of America. According to this view, middle America has been

bamboozled into conservatism at the hands of power-brokers and fat cats, but remains "populist" at heart. (Paradoxically, this illusion—that America is a "good" country—parallels the one projected with knowing smarm by Nixon, who astutely understood the limits of "goodness" and played them for what they were worth.) McGovern believed that Americans had material self-interest in supporting his programs and that, in addition, many would respond to his moral appeals. He did not reckon with irrational fear and paranoia. Nor did he appreciate the extent to which—over the course of two centuries—the notions of conquest, manifest destiny, and racial superiority have been welded into the American character.

So wishful was his analysis that he was willing to disband his primary campaign organizations and to place his candidacy in the hands of organization Democrats who actually had a stake in his defeat. This turned out to be the meat of his trumpeted reconciliation with Daley, Johnson, and party bosses around the country. In California, Illinois, Texas, Ohio, New York, and elsewhere he closed down offices out of which he had run his primary drive; he transferred key aides to different parts of the country and brought in new leadership; he began to work through organizations which had not only opposed his nomination but which on some level would view his victory as a disaster, threatening traditional control of the party. It was a go-for-broke, all-or-nothing strategy in which McGovern cut off the possibility of losing electorally but scoring a moral (and a long-term political) victory. In the end, he was just another defeated politician.

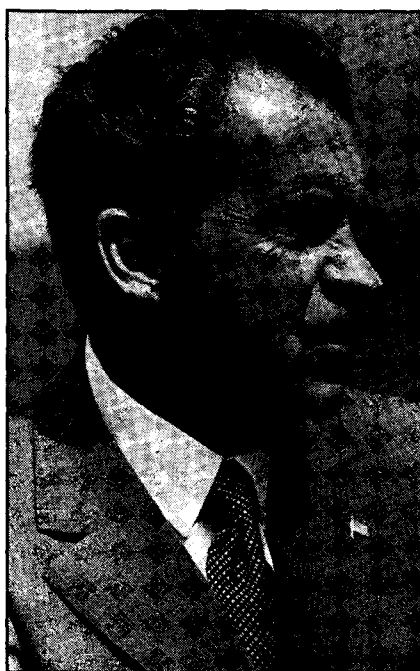
Not that the usual precinct work did not go on, but the situation called for basic political organizing—the kind that could use the momentum of the election to get started and then carry on beyond election day, working through structures established in place of, or alongside, the traditional party organizations.

In the absence of such a plan to organize what would amount to a new Democratic Party, McGovern was left to compete in the national political spotlight. He became a crusader without a crusade. Worse, he became a re-

former without reforms. (What program for change could ever succeed if it depended for its success on, say, Mayor Daley of Chicago?)

Under the circumstances he emerged as a Bible-thumping weakling. A traditional Presidential race, after all, is a contest of strength, and the winner demonstrates that he can best handle those "awesome burdens of the Presidency" so far beyond the comprehension of the average citizen. If he had honestly attempted to reorient presidential politics, to develop a plan for returning power to the people, McGovern's candor—his willingness to admit mistakes and change his mind—might have been turned to his advantage. Instead he appeared flabby and indecisive. Nixon, for his part, played the role of the statesman above politics. Evidence might come to light of heinous crimes for which he was directly accountable, but nothing could shake his image of strength and competence.

To be sure, the President could not have risen to such eminence without his foreign policy successes, for which McGovern is hardly to blame. Had the Soviet Union and China met Nixon's challenge last May—by redoubling their support to Vietnam and isolating the United States diplomatically—no amount of duplicity could have masked his failure to end the war. But instead his ploy worked—more than worked: the Russians did everything



on Nixon's behalf but supply bugging equipment to the Committee to Re-elect the President. And so Nixon, not McGovern, emerged in the popular eye as the man of peace.

Under these circumstances, McGovern might not have been able to avoid a defeat, but he could have established an organizational base from which we might build a serious counter-force to the Nixon-Agnew-Wallace plan for the 1970's. As it is, he does not even have a firm grip on the Democratic Party, and, while this is being written, the likes of George Meany and Henry Jackson are moving in for the kill.

Still, it was not wrong for us to cast in our lot with McGovern, and we ought not regret it. Wish as we might that he had lived up to the promise of his primary drive, even a back-pedaling, conciliatory McGovern offered better hope for a just solution to the Vietnam War than Nixon. Now it remains for the disloyal opposition to do on its own what the McGovern campaign failed to do. Two points are worth noting. First, 45 percent of the eligible voters did not bother to vote—an important indicator of McGovern's failure. Second, the President's victory was, after all, built on an illusion. The 1960s was *not* a bad dream. The malcontents will *not* go away, and this country *cannot* be violently wrenched back into a Norman Rockwell fantasy. The San Francisco Black Caucus said it in a post-election release. The Nixon landslide, it warned, "signals the beginning of the most bitter internal conflict this country has yet to see. It proves that the goals and ideals that this country was supposedly founded upon were and are but a sham and that the fears and paranoia of whites in this country . . . take definite priority over the welfare and education of black children, over jobs for black parents, and over [reform of] one of the most discriminatory, lopsided, unjust, so-called law systems to be found anywhere in the world. . . . To those of us who are black in both mind and body, we know that we will not give in to the dispassionate contempt of the Nixon administration for its black and non-white people. We will only fight harder."

And at Southern University, the students took over a building. . . . ○



# HARD TIMES

## indians at the b. i. a. BURY MY HEART ON THE POTOMAC

by eugene l. meyer

*I pledge allegiance to the United  
Tribes of America and to our Heritage  
for which we stand. In one Nation  
under Wanka Tonka in the Sea of  
White, We Will Remain Red for Ever!  
(Seen on the back of an Army  
jacket worn by a Sioux from  
Fort Peck, Montana)*

*Wanka Tonka—Our Great Spirit in  
Sioux—must have been watching over  
the 850 American Indians who occu-  
pied the Bureau of Indian Affairs for  
seven days in November. They had  
come in peace to discuss grievances  
with the federal bureaucracy. But by  
the time they left, they had brought  
an institution of government to a com-  
plete standstill and left it a shambles.  
A year and a half earlier, May Day  
protestors had come to Washington  
with precisely that purpose in mind  
and had been met with mass arrests  
and the suspension of police rules. The  
Indians, however, emerged from their  
confrontation virtually unscathed, no  
busts and no heads busted, and al-  
lowed to leave the building and the  
city under a signed "recommendation"  
for amnesty from the same White  
House that had taken such a hard line  
on May Day 1971.*

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ington Post and has written for the New  
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Review. He has contributed a chapter to  
The Federal Social Dollar in its Own  
Backyard. (Bureau of National Affairs).*

IT STARTS OUT AS A CARAVAN, along the Trail of Broken Treaties, they said. Led by the American Indian Movement, they come to Washington strictly on business, for negotiations with the Indian desks of the various federal bureaucracies. They do not come for confrontation.

But once in Washington they run into unexpected roadblocks. Army officials deny them permission for religious services at Arlington National Cemetery. Then, they have no place to stay except the All Souls Church in the heart of Washington's ghetto. Finally, they decide to take up temporary residence in the Bureau of Indian Affairs, a few blocks from the White House. Housing has become the issue.

At first, they simply want to arrange accommodations, but even while their representatives are working out an agreement with federal authorities, a battle erupts between BIA guards and young Indians. As word of the fight spreads, the occupiers of the BIA begin to barricade the building with furniture, lockers, and machinery. The



Caravan reaches the BIA

next day the Indians prepare to abandon the building in favor of the General Services Administration auditorium, but they find the auditorium locked and so they hold fast to the BIA.

By the third day, November 4, the BIA has become the focal point for all kinds of non-Indian activists. It is a throwback to the 1960s. Even Stokely Carmichael, recently returned from Africa, comes to offer support. Local D.C. radicals pass out literature.

By coincidence, Rev. Carl McIntire, the conservative radio preacher, is in town with his followers for a Capitol-steps rally backing Thieu. But first, he goes to the BIA, where he winds up listening to Stokely. "I heard a revo-o-lu-tion-ary speech!" he tells his rally.

"I think it's time," McIntire says, "that we went over to the Indians ourselves and said you are Americans, let's not follow the Commie line. Would you like to see the Indians?"

Like a fifth grade class that has been asked if it wants to see the zoo animals, McIntire's two hundred respond enthusiastically. "Tell them if they're real good, we'll give them the country back," one woman says.

Singing "Onward Christian Soldiers," the McIntire people are bused to the BIA where they march back and forth on the sidewalk. "Yes, we have a message for our Indian friends," McIntire says through a bull-horn. "All right, you Indians, we're here to give you some greetings. I want you to have your rights. Cheerio, cheerio. All right, you Indians, wave from the windows."

The Indian leadership approaches McIntire on the sidewalk and brings him onto the lawn, where McIntire gives his qualified support. "Mr. McIntire, we're asking you to leave these grounds," Dennis Banks, a national field director of AIM, says. "If you have any Christian blood," he suggests that McIntire march to the nearby