

State of Affairs

Henry Brandon

The Wallace Effect

JUDGING BY the campaign strategy Vice President Humphrey and Richard M. Nixon have adopted, one cannot be certain whether they are fighting each other or whether they consider George Wallace to be their toughest adversary. I have the feeling that they are not quite sure themselves.

After the Republican convention in Miami, everything indicated that Mr. Nixon would pursue what is generally referred to as the "Southern strategy." His choice of Governor Spiro T. Agnew as his running mate seemed to confirm this. Underlying the "Southern strategy" was evidence of a growing Republican trend in Southern and border states. Significant new gains were beckoning in these areas. Since then, however, two factors have assumed a growing importance. First, there are indications that it may not be easy to pry as many votes away from Mr. Wallace as had been assumed, for instead of losing momentum he seems to be gaining it. The extent to which Nixon can rely on the South's electoral votes is now less certain. Secondly, Nixon seems to feel uncomfortable engaging in the kind of "gloves off" campaign necessary to outbid Wallace. Nixon is very conscious of his "gut-fighter" past and he wants it to be forgotten. He therefore doesn't want to engage Wallace in the kind of speech-making that would lead people to say that the "old" Nixon has returned to the hustings.

There is no easy compromise between taking a statesmanlike stance and going down into the gutter to compete with Wallace. Nixon therefore seems to want to remain above the battle. He is in such an advantageous position that he may have enough elbow room to shift to an alternate strategy if necessary. He already is competing directly with Vice President Humphrey for the white middle-class vote in the suburbs of the big Northern states. They are the people

who would have voted readily for Governor Nelson Rockefeller or Senator Eugene McCarthy.

Vice President Humphrey has opted for the "Northern strategy." He did not have much of a choice, accepting the fact that there is no use trying to compete for the Wallace vote in the South. But his problem is not simply choosing a strategy. First of all, he must concentrate on uniting the badly rent Democratic party, which, after all, is the majority party. This not only means winning the support of leaders of various interest groups, but also exciting the enthusiasms of the party workers; Democrats, especially, need to feel inspired and aroused to give their best. Yet so far, the Vice President is making slow progress in making people feel enthusiastic about himself. Some politicians are more impressive in private, others in public; Humphrey belongs to the former category. In narrowing down his "Northern strategy," he has concluded, not unlike Senator Eugene McCarthy, that he must direct his main appeal to the suburbanites who include most of the independent voters and on whom the margin of victory depends. They want to get rid of the war in Vietnam, and they are also deeply worried about the decline of law and order; but they may prefer to rely on Humphrey rather than Nixon.

The Negroes, Humphrey's strategy assumes, have nowhere to go but to the Democrats, and, anyway, they must know that Mr. Humphrey is their man. He has been, after all, one of the earliest civil rights advocates. The rallying of the industrial workers will in a large measure be left to the political organizers of the trade unions. But there are some serious risks in taking the Negro and the blue collar worker votes for granted, especially as Mr. Wallace has been able to make considerable headway among the latter.

Humphrey's third line of attack is "giving Nixon hell." While Nixon is try-

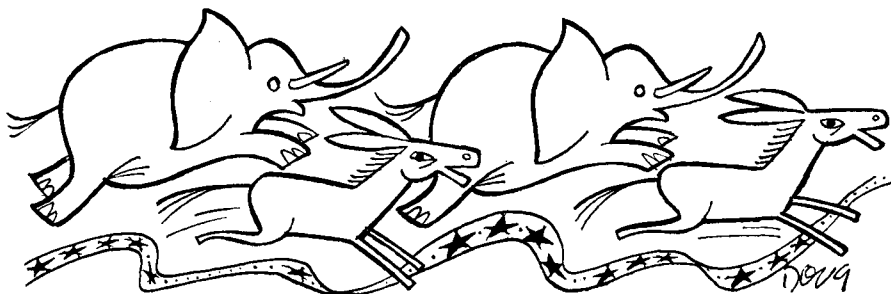
ing to bury the old Nixon, Humphrey is trying to keep him alive and in the public mind. If nothing else, he hopes the old Nixon bogey will serve to unite the Democrats. Nixon's retort is to link Humphrey to the policies of the unpopular Johnson Administration, and so far Mr. Humphrey has not been very successful in adopting a different, more independent line of policy.

Nixon starts as the favorite. He has a strong base in the Midwest and the West. He can rely on winning Alaska, Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. Leaning to Nixon are California, Ohio, and Washington, which he captured eight years ago, and Texas, Illinois, and New Mexico, where he lost by less than 1 per cent of the vote.

The Vice President has readily accepted the role of the underdog. He is certain to win Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia, and he has a good chance of capturing Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia. This would give him 148 electoral votes against Nixon's 230. If we assume that the remaining states are either in Wallace's pocket (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi), or are a toss-up between Nixon or Humphrey, it becomes quite obvious that Nixon is starting with a thumping advantage.

Of the two key issues, the war in Vietnam and law and order, Humphrey at best can turn the first to his advantage only if some visible progress develops at the conference table in Paris, and can only neutralize the negative effect of the second. President Johnson could help his Vice President by halting the bombing of North Vietnam altogether, but he seems inclined, at least for now, to believe that Nixon's relatively hawkish stand on Vietnam helps to neutralize this issue too. Yet nothing would unite the Democrats more and give the entire party a new fillip than if the Paris negotiations were to move off dead center and if people became more persuaded that the Democrats want to find an end to the war.

With the two main issues more or less neutralized, with both candidates stymied by Wallace's strength in the South and by the inroads he has made among the lower-middle-class whites in the North, this has become a campaign full of frustrations and pitfalls for both Nixon and Humphrey. The difficulty the two have in competing for the Wallace vote, the threat that Wallace represents to the whole political system, is one of the most disturbing aspects of this campaign, not only for the candidates but for the country as a whole.



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THE DARK HEART OF AMERICAN HISTORY

"We like to think of ourselves as a peaceful, tolerant, benign people," but, writes a historian, the other strain in our tradition is a propensity for violence, both individual and collective.



Illustrations from Bettmann Archive.

"The Bostonians Paying the Excise-Man," 1774—tarring and feathering in protest against British taxes.

By ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.

THE murders within five years of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy raise—or ought to raise—somber questions about the character of contemporary America. One such murder might be explained away as an isolated horror, unrelated to the inner life of our society. But the successive shootings, in a short time, of three men who greatly embodied the idealism of American life suggest not so much a fortuitous set of aberrations as an emerging pattern of response and action—a spreading and ominous belief in the efficacy of violence and the politics of the deed.

Yet, while each of these murders produced a genuine season of national mourning, none has produced a sus-

tained season of national questioning. In every case, remorse has seemed to end, not as an incitement to self-examination, but as an escape from it. An orgy of sorrow and shame becomes an easy way of purging a bad conscience and returning as quickly as possible to business as usual.

"It would be . . . self-deceptive," President Johnson said after the shooting of Robert Kennedy, "to conclude from this act that our country is sick, that it has lost its balance, that it has lost its sense of direction, even its common decency. Two hundred million Americans did not strike down Robert Kennedy last night any more than they struck down John F. Kennedy in 1963 or Dr. Martin Luther King in April of this year."

I do not quarrel with these words.

Of course two hundred million Americans did not strike down these men. Nor, in my judgment, is this a question of a "sick society" or of "collective guilt." I do not know what such phrases mean, but I am certain that they do not represent useful ways of thinking about our problem. Obviously most Americans are decent and God-fearing people. Obviously most Americans were deeply and honestly appalled by these atrocities. Obviously most Americans rightly resent being told that they were "guilty" of crimes they neither willed nor wished.

Still, it is not enough to dismiss the ideas of a sick society and of collective guilt and suppose that such dismissal closes the question. For a problem remains—the problem of a contagion of political murder in the United States

"Extra-legal group action, for better or worse, has been part of the process of American democracy"—Left to right: An anti-Catholic group, the "Native Americans," attacks state militia in Philadelphia, 1844; draft riots in New York City, 1863; labor riot in Haymarket Square, Chicago, 1886.



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