

Politics

Can Race Destroy the Democrats?

The war of coded words about race has the potential to cause the internal crack-up the party always fears.



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Speaker Stumbles

Sleek, sonorous Joseph F. Carlino. 44.

G.O.P. boss of booming Nassau County and Speaker of the New York state assembly, was a leading aspirant to succeed Nelson Rockefeller as Governor some day.

Of the current crop of New York Republicans, Carlino had shot up farther and faster than anyone but Rocky himself.

But last week ambitious Joe Carlino was fighting for his political life. Appearing before the assembly's Committee on Ethics and Guidance, he defended himself against conflict-of-interest charges that he had had an interest in an atom-shelter firm that stood to profit from a \$100 million school and college shelter program that Carlino helped get enacted last year. The source of the charges was a political oddity: Manhattan's Freshman Democratic Assemblyman Mark Lane, 34, a shaggy lone wolf who is as popular with his liberal Yorkville and East Harlem constituency as he is unpopular with his colleagues on both sides of the Albany aisle. "Mark," says a friend, "sees himself as a beplumed knight on a white charger whenever he undertakes a cause." Lane has undertaken plenty of causes: from his law office he has handled hundreds of cases—often without a fee—in defense of narcotics addicts, civil liberties and tenants' rights. Last summer he charged down to Mississippi as a Freedom Rider; he is still out on \$500 bond after a breach-of-peace arrest. His fellow assemblymen, both Democratic and Republican, groan pointedly when Lane rises to deliver one of his long and emotional speeches. He clearly hopes to make his assault against Carlino a springboard for a try this year for Congress.

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Press of Business. Lane began tilting against Carlino just ten days after New York's school-shelter bill became law last November. He cited Carlino as a director of Lancer Industries, Inc., a Long Island firm that controls a major shelter-manufacturing concern. Lancer, cried Lane, figured for a windfall out of the shelter law. Last week, before the assembly ethics committee, Carlino argued that Lancer could not possibly have benefited from the bill; the company makes only home-sized shelters, not the larger shelters called for by the state program. Nelson Rockefeller also defended Carlino.

In his testimony, Carlino explained his relationship with Lancer—in terms that sometimes seemed limp. The association, he said, had begun when Lancer, then primarily a swimming-pool manufacturer, hired his law firm at a \$500 monthly retainer; later, although he held no Lancer stock, Carlino was made a member of the board. In the spring of 1961, Carlino was informed that Lancer was going to start making shelters. By his own admission, he realized that he might have a conflict-of-interest problem because "the state might ultimately be involved in some legislation involving home fallout shelters." Carlino said he telephoned Lancer to announce his intention to resign from the board. But the press of political business had prevented him from writing a letter of resignation until after the state shelter bill was passed.

Prospects Dimmed. Clearly, Joe Carlino at best had been guilty of bad judgment. And as last week's hearing came to an end, he was a worried man. "This," he cried to the assembly committee, "has taken on the aspect of a concerted effort to break down the confidence of the people in government as we know it." Then, bursting out of the hearing room, he flailed wildly at Lane on television. Behind the charges against him were the "enemies of the United States, those closely connected with the Communist Party . . . Their technique is to beat fallout shelters throughout the United States." As for Lane: "I don't know if he is being used or if he is part and parcel of it."

Reading its report to the assembly, the Committee on Ethics and Guidance seemed unlikely to hand Carlino more than a wrist slapping. But Joe Carlino's prospects for bigger and better political things had certainly dimmed.

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