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Lowenstein Legacy

'Al People' Remember the Man and His Vision

By Carla Hall

"Can you imagine," Rep. Tom Harkin (D-Iowa) asked the audience in the Cannon Caucus room, "what Al Lowenstein would have done when he had found out that Ernest Lefever was the administration's nominee for assistant secretary of state for human rights?"

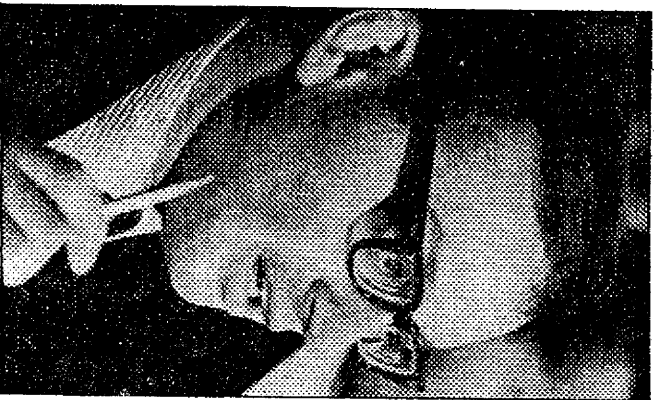
The audience chuckled at the image of the late Allard Lowenstein: antiwar activist, civil rights activist, originator, in 1967, of the Dump Johnson movement, one-term congressman, tireless, electric, charismatic. They could predict what he would have thought of the controversial Lefever, the bane of human rights activists. But wait . . .

"First," said Harkin, "we would have found out Al Lowenstein and Ernest Lefever washed dishes together in college." Laughter surged through the room.

The stories were like that on Saturday—memories of Lowenstein, the man who mobilized students with his oratory and his "we-can-do-it" spirit, the man who somehow managed to catalyze people at all points on the political spectrum. "Never did anybody have so many friends on the other side of the issue," said Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.). And when he was felled by seven bullets from the gun of a mentally troubled former protégé, both Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and conservative William Buckley spoke at the memorial service.

So those who gathered at the first

See *LOWENSTEIN*, C11, Col. 1



Allard Lowenstein in 1967

LOWENSTEIN, From C1

Allard Lowenstein Congressional Symposium this weekend could only be classified as "Al people," the term his brother Larry used. They were students grown older, politicians, human rights activists and friends, and all told stories, which inevitably highlighted feverish conversations with Lowenstein, late into the night. Ellison C. Wynn, a retired Army major who was Lowenstein's commander in the Army, heard about the symposium and was there. Mike Farrell, B.J. Hunicutt of M*A*S*H, who is producing a documentary on Lowenstein, sat in the audience.

The symposium ranged from panel discussions on domestic political priorities to human rights and American foreign policy. There was angry talk about what Reagan is doing and there was impatient response from the audience along the lines of "Okay, just what will we do as an alternative?"

"I remember the night of the New Hampshire primary in 1980," said Susan McLane, former Republican state senator from New Hampshire. "My daughter had spent all day diving Al around New Hampshire. He was campaigning for Kennedy. My

daughter voted for Anderson. My husband and I were heading the Bush campaign in New Hampshire. . . . I don't think there was a person there who had voted for Ronald Reagan. Every one of us was a loser. So here we are again, a bunch of losers, and we're going to talk about what Al would have done."

So they talked:

"Allard—who expended so much of his heart and mind toward getting Americans out of a war in Southeast Asia—would have been an invaluable ally for those of us who are trying to keep Americans from getting into a war in Central America," said Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.).

"He'd be very concerned about El Salvador," said the Rev. William Wipfler from the National Council of Churches. "I think he'd be fighting terribly the cutting away of four decades of programs that helped the poor, and he'd be fighting the military budget tooth and nail. No question."

"Al Lowenstein would have regarded what's happening today with horror," boomed Father Robert Drinan, former Democratic congressman from Massachusetts and now

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president of Americans for Democratic Action. "We're looking at the total counterrevolution of all the things that Al Lowenstein fought for . . ."

And from a man in the audience: "I really wonder if Al would participate in an all-day seminar where we're all saying the same things. . . . I think he would have demanded action . . ."

It's not presumptuous to compare Al Lowenstein with Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King," said Rep. Andrew Jacobs (D-Ind.).

How did a one-term congressman move people like this? It had less to do with his time in Congress and more to do with his work outside Congress—his antiwar activism, his founding of an organization (the Coalition for a Democratic Alternative) dedicated to blocking Lyndon Johnson's renomination for the presidency. He was only a congressman from the 5th Congressional District in Long Island—from 1968 to 1970. He was defeated for reelection in 1970. But he was active in other is-

ssues (like voter-registration of year-olds) and organizations (he was chairman of Americans for Democratic Action). In 1977, he was named U.S. ambassador to the United Nations for special political affairs.

"In 1967, I was organizing students against the war," said Steve Cohen, professor of law at the Georgetown University Law Center, who was on Lowenstein's 1968 congressional campaign staff. "Allard would go into a hostile audience who were pro-war and in five minutes, he would convert them into doves. Well, maybe not five. Maybe, 10."

"I don't know if any of you are familiar with the Lowenstein domino theory," said Greg Craig during the human rights panel discussion. "You know how you change the regime in South Africa? By changing the regime in Spain." (Chuckles around the room.) "By changing the regime in Spain, the regime in Portugal would fall. Now if the Portuguese regime fell, Angola and Mozambique

would fall and that would open the doors to South Africa."

After the panel discussion, documentary filmmaker Barbara Miller walked away, brooding over El Salvador. "Just because a middle-ground solution hasn't been found in El Salvador doesn't mean it can't be found," she said. "Al would find one that would satisfy the ultimate solution."

Miller met Lowenstein in 1968 when she was doing research for a film on the Democratic convention that was never made. She kept running into him after that. "In following the Kennedys or whatever, you always came back to him," she said. "You couldn't avoid him. I was so impressed with Al. You couldn't predict what he would say. He would attract the most intelligent liberals and conservatives. He thought about each issue independently."

Now she's trying to do the same. "What do you do if you're a liberal and you can't stand what you see in Poland? That means you support Reagan," she said. "If you look at what the Russians are doing in Afghanistan, in Poland, they are really on the move. You can't take all the isolationist views we used to take. Lord knows, I've marched enough

for peace. But I think we have to be like Al and look at each situation."

Allard Lowenstein's ex-wife Jenny Littlefield and his two children were there. Tom Lowenstein is 12, has dark curly hair, and was dressed in a jacket and tie, with white tennis shoes. "Lots of people come up and say, 'I've known you since you were this high,' and other people come up and say, 'I'll bet everyone's saying to you, 'I've known you since you were this high.''" He smiled and shrugged. "I don't mind it. It's kind of fun."

At the end of a day filled with praise for Lowenstein and concern for the much-battered liberal cause, some perspective was offered. Said Rep. Frank: "You hear the charge that liberals have no new ideas. In the first place, very few people in politics have new ideas. This is not high-energy physics. What you get are different combinations of ideas. The ideas that Reagan proposed in 1980 are the things that got him laughed at in 1976." With those words, the "Al people" went out into the warm, late afternoon sunshine in search of such new combinations.