



Post 5-19-72

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Message From Michigan

OBSCURED by the attempted assassination of Gov. George C. Wallace on the eve of his Tuesday doubleheader victory, the results from Michigan were a dagger pointed at the heart of the Democratic Party's chances in November.

Even more menacing than Wallace's statewide Michigan romp were his incredible showings in heavily unionized areas where the United Auto Workers (UAW) and other unions regularly deliver Democratic majorities. Statewide, the Wallace sweep can be rationalized partly in terms of a sympathy vote and huge Republican crossover. In specific blue-collar precincts, however, there is no minimizing the genuine revolt over racial school busing by rank-and-file Democrats.

"Wallace told them to send us a message, and they sure as hell did," says one influential state Democratic leader. The message: Michigan's Democratic leaders are so far alienated from their voters that President Nixon would carry the state today—easily. And if liberal Michigan goes Republican, can the rest of the nation be far behind?

The message has other ominous components: Organized labor is pretty nearly impotent in deliver-

ing its members when busing overshadows all else. Sen. Hubert Humphrey's fence-straddling on busing is a political suicide weapon. And Sen. George McGovern's phenomenal support from blue-collar workers shows signs of abating.

These grim tidings for both McGovern and Humphrey far transcend the success of the stricken Wallace. Thanks to Wallace's own failure to anticipate his future success and his consequent lack of advance planning, he will not enter the Miami Beach convention with delegates in any way commensurate with his popular support. The delegate-selection system works in such a way that Wallace can not long retain many of his first-ballot delegates. He cannot be nominated.

Moreover, the Wallace voters in Michigan were not for Wallace so much as they were against busing and the Democratic establishment. A variety of polls showed Wallace last in credibility and potential job performance.

CONSIDER two Michigan counties, both blue collar in character, with hereditary UAW influence but now obsessed by busing. Macomb County, just north of De-

troit: Wallace, 90,309; McGovern, 25,383; Humphrey, 13,635; Genesee County, containing Flint: Wallace, 38,501; McGovern, 21,220; Humphrey, 9,927.

What happened to Humphrey? Michigan politicians say his formulation against "busing from a good school to a poor school" came over as waffling. His blue-collar constituency wanted an unequivocal "no" on busing and heard it only from Wallace. Humphrey's Michigan advisers who told him the voters would settle for moderation misread their state.

How, then, could McGovern, even less anti-busing than Humphrey, run far better in these blue-collar counties? The answer: His strength was centered in non-blue-collar precincts—more affluent white-collar areas that form the hard nucleus of the McGovern constituency.

One analysis of McGovern's Maryland-Michigan vote Tuesday gave him only a 10 to 15 per cent showing in selected blue-collar precincts. In Maryland, for example, his only delegate votes and his only good showing came in rich, white, liberal, antiwar Montgomery County. Thus did Tuesday's balloting threaten to propel

McGovern back to his narrow-based peace candidacy of months ago.

To some shrewd Democrats there is still hope for 1972 only if they follow this formula: While reaffirming belief in racial equality and school desegregation, join the vast majority of voters (94.5 per cent in Michigan's Macomb County, according to Tuesday's balloting) and flatly oppose racial busing.

But in so doing, McGovern men fear losing his liberal constituency, and Humphrey men fear losing the black support that has kept him in the race. Beyond that lies ideology. Even in Michigan, some prominent Democrats tell us they would rather be right on busing than win elections—a syndrome usually connected with a fatal political malady.

The notion that Tuesday's vote was an idle protest seems wishful thinking. A pre-primary poll taken by Oliver Quayle for NBC News showed 61 per cent of Wallace's Michigan support would vote for Mr. Nixon against Humphrey in November. If the Democrats cannot shape their views on busing to popular demand, they can only hope that federal judges will do no more about school integration until after election day.

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