

Plot, 9/2/68

Hubert Humphrey: Good Guy, Villain

By Marquis Childs

United Feature Syndicate

CHICAGO—Hubert Humphrey, the good guy, the man of compassion, the Mayor of Minneapolis who brought reconciliation to warring political and racial factions, the young Senator who fought for civil rights, is billed as a villain. It is one of the cruel ironies of a cruel and unpredictable time.

As the Presidential candidate of his party, he appears a prisoner of the past. He must now prove that he can throw off the shackles of his recent past and in the next two months stand before the country as his own man. One of his handicaps is that within his own party is an embittered faction determined to hang that past around his neck and prove he cannot win in November.

Another handicap is Chicago as a symbol—a torn and divided city ruled by a tough old man using the tough old methods of another day. When Mayor Richard J. Daley clamped down his iron jaw and said that Chicago would have the convention or else, the trap was set for Humphrey. What is more, Humphrey knew it and in the pre-convention phase there seemed to be nothing he could do about it.

This is the background of the Chicago story. There were those, and Humphrey was among them, who foresaw just what would happen. The argument was over whether to follow the Republicans and take the Democratic convention to Miami Beach where security and at least comparative quiet could be achieved.

SEVERAL MONTHS AGO, in a debate at the highest level, the question was put: how will it look if the Democrats hold their convention behind barbed wire and with National Guardsmen with fixed bayonets lining the streets? What kind of impression will that give on the television screens of the Nation and the world? This was the argument not only of those who saw a serious tactical error in the making but of the security people.

Daley had, however, an ally who could throw the ultimate weight in the balance. President Johnson said that Miami Beach was a rich man's playground and the Democrats would not go there. It was symptomatic of the credibility gap that when this reporter printed an account of that argument, the White House indignantly denied it.

So the script for Chicago began to take shape, and the shape has been uglier than even those with the gloomiest forebodings

could have foreseen. When Daley pulled the strings to block a peaceful protest in the vicinity of the convention hall, the battle of the Conrad Hilton became almost inevitable.

As Humphrey is saying, as he knows perhaps better than anyone in the country, Chicago is not an isolated case. The breakdown may be more advanced here because the confrontation between the haves—the rich, affluent haves—and the have-nots is more brutal and more naked. The romanticism of Chicago's brawling past, Carl Sandburg's "hog butcher to the world," is today simple violence, the suppressed hatred of the ghettos that broke out in an orgy of looting and burning after the assassination of Martin Luther King.

Going to the country, candidate Humphrey must win over a substantial segment of opinion to the belief that he can as President start to remake the crumbling cities, and while the phrase may have been unfortunate, since rebuilding urban America is not really comparable to the rehabilitation of war-ravaged Europe, the thrust of his meaning is there. It will take money, money, money and taxes, taxes, taxes.

The issue will be clearly drawn. Richard Nixon, his opponent, says that money is not the answer. He called first for a cut of \$8-billion in the domestic budget and then a more modest cut of \$6 billion. The economies imposed by Congress have already sliced into the programs for the slums.

THE IMMEDIATE PROBLEM for Humphrey is how to conduct a national campaign with any hope of order and civility. The far-out war protesters and the McCarthyites promise to try to break up his public meetings.

They will picket, they will shout, they will use every conceivable tactic to make it impossible for him to take his case to the country. He cannot cloak his movements in secrecy, as President Johnson has had to do for the past year or more because of the threat of mass demonstrations or worse.

Nor is reliance on television a sufficient answer. Television is not Humphrey's happiest medium of communication. He is at best when he is before a crowd. Then he comes through as a warm and compassionate man striving to move the country forward in the tradition of the Democratic Presidents in the recent past.

An urgent demand is for able campaign assistants. During his pre-convention drive, Humphrey had the help of the professional, Lawrence O'Brien, with perhaps the surest touch in the business. He worked for John F. Kennedy and then in the last phase of his career for Robert Kennedy. Faced with a sea of troubles, Humphrey has fortunately been able to persuade O'Brien to serve as campaign manager and chairman of the Democratic National Committee. Humphrey is going to need all the help he can get from the ablest professionals, like O'Brien, in the days ahead.