

Two Middle Classes Collide

Chicago Explosion Is Symptomatic Of Deeper Antagonism

By Joseph Kraft

CHICAGO — The violence that scarred the Democratic convention here is too serious a matter to be muddled by loose talk about a police state and Gestapo tactics.

What happened is that the shock troops of the two most antagonistic social groups in the country were allowed to collide in conditions of high tension and with the kind of publicity bound to aggravate divisions across the country. That this clash was allowed to take place underlines anew the question of whether any of the present leaders of the Democratic Party are truly fit to rule the country.

The police state analogy is misleading because what happened here does not fit at all into the classic pattern of official repression of the democratic process. That process was in fact going forward, no more imperfectly than usual, inside the convention. The demonstrators outside, by their vicious language and provocative acts, were trying to obstruct it. The police, in their misguided way, were trying to protect it.

The pattern that does fit the facts arises from an antagonism that I have recently been stressing a great deal. I mean the antagonism between the rising middle class of upper-income whites and the archaic middle class of lower-income whites.

The young people who protested are typical products of the rising middle class. They are well-educated and without major economic worries. They are full of confidence and high aspiration, particularly for the achievement of peace and equality for the Negro.

But they have no sympathy for whites without their educational and economic advantages. They express their contempt by demonstrations, by words, by dress and by their central political tactic. That tactic is the tactic of "play the game my way or else there will be trouble"—the traditional tactic of the elite.

The police who clubbed the demonstrators are typical expressions of the archaic middle class. They are indifferently educated and badly paid. Their aspirations run along unlofty lines, to a home, a car and a TV set. They are engaged in traditional occupations, now being loaded down with new requirements because of the changes brought on by the Negro colonization of the central cities.

BECAUSE OF THESE changes, the police, to begin with, are on the defensive. They are not friendly to the Negroes. And they return with interest the contempt felt by the upper-income white backers of the Negro cause.

In these circumstances, it was inevitable that any naked confrontation between police and protesting young people would be violent. It is typical of their feelings that, in one confrontation here, the demonstrators were shouting at the police: "Pigs, pigs, pigs." And the police were shouting back: "Kill, kill, kill."

But who let this confrontation come about? Well, first of all, Mayor Richard Daley of Chicago. He insisted on having the convention here, despite much advance evidence of trouble. His bossy manner and tough talk practically invited the police to club away with gusto.

Still, Daley is himself only an expression of the archaic middle class. It would have taken an act of supreme self-restraint for him not to use muscle on the demonstrators. But how about the other leaders of the Democratic Party? Couldn't any of them have acted to prevent or mitigate what happened?

Lyndon Johnson undoubtedly could have moved to change the site of the convention or soften the mood of the Mayor. But the President these days seems concerned only with sanctifying the mistakes he has made in Vietnam. His chief contribution here was to intensify feelings of hostility and suspicion by hardening what was

originally a moderate majority statement on Vietnam.

Then there is Sen. Eugene McCarthy. Weeks ago, he knew he was not going to get the nomination and he could have worked out a way of letting his followers down gently that might have muted the confrontation. But the Senator is a man who prefers letting things happen to organizing them. No more than he had a program for ending the Vietnam war did he have a plan for making a decent exit from the race. And thus he sent his followers down the path to a disaster that could have at least been softened.

LASTLY, OF COURSE, there is Vice President Humphrey. He could have mitigated what happened by making concessions to the other side on Vietnam and by soothing Daley. But the Vice President was a frightened man in the last stages of his nomination. He allowed Mayor Daley and President Johnson to run what could have been his convention.

I still believe that, excluding the late Sen. Robert Kennedy, Humphrey is the Democratic leader best equipped to avert further explosions of the social collision that took place here in Chicago. Unlike President Johnson or McCarthy or Daley, he at least has the right instincts. And his selection of Sen. Edmund Muskie of Maine as running-mate testifies to those decent instincts.

But the Vice President has yet to make his decent instincts felt on the broad plane of events. He has yet to organize his escape from thrall to the Presidency. He has yet to show, as he once put it, that he is "captain of the team." And unless he does these things, the Chicago riots will be only one more incident in the long parade of events pointing to the conclusion that the Democratic Party and its current set of leaders are unfit to govern the country in this time of troubles.

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