

WASHINGTON, Saturday.
AMERICA'S political professionals are, in Washington's jargon, starting to "run scared." There is a growing feeling among them that 1968, the most freakish presidential year in memory, has more shocks in store.

The numbness that overcame them in the aftermath of Senator Robert Kennedy's assassination is giving way to a new kind of panic. As August, the month of decision for the two main parties—first the Republicans in Miami and then the Democrats in Chicago—looms up a great restlessness is sweeping the land. Before it is out the pros, as Convention delegates, will have named their candidates for the White House.

But now, and quite suddenly, it has begun to look as if a voters' mutiny is on hand. Outsiders like peace candidate Senator Eugene McCarthy and Alabama's arch-segregationist, former Governor George Wallace, are showing startling strength and drawing such crowds wherever they go as to unnerve the "regulars" of both the major parties.

Almost out of the blue last weekend a movement blossomed that had earnest young canvassers out in force rounding up signatures for petitions demanding "open" conventions—that is, ones where State delegations would not vote en bloc but as individuals—the effect of which would obviously be to undermine the power of those faceless men, the backroom "king-makers."

Then came a drive by youthful critics of President Johnson's Vietnam war policy, both Republican and Democrat, to strike out on their own if frustrated by their respective party bosses. Already there is a third party on the Right in the field—with Wallace at its head—and now there is more than just talk about the emergence of a fourth, on the Left, built around the angry doves, the effect of which might

America's backroom "kingmakers"
 Even a link between dissidents from

IS THIS A MUTINY?

well be so to fragment the electorate as to produce wholly unpredictable results.

Some of its proponents admit candidly that their objective is not so much to get into power this year as to shatter the existing two-party system to make way for a new political alignment on ideological grounds in 1972—it being true enough, of course, that many a Southern Democrat is far more conservative than any Republican, while some of the latter are more radical than most of Johnson's residual faithful.

It had lately been taken pretty much for granted by America's leading political analysts that the main contenders for the November elections were as good as picked already, barring the formalities: former Vice-President Richard Nixon would run against Vice-President Hubert Humphrey. The experts were telling each other that the only excitement left in the race was over who would be each man's choice of Vice-President—to enhance his appeal to this or that otherwise unenchanted block of voters.

Even the fact that New York's Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Minnesota's Senator Eugene McCarthy have been shown consistently in every other public opinion poll to be substantially

preferred by voters to either Nixon or Humphrey had failed to shake the hardbitten veterans of America's political wars.

Then, abruptly, the mood changed. The pros began hedging their bets. "This is a year when anything can happen" is the current parrot cry among them.

This week at the National Conference of the 50 State Governors in Cincinnati, an assemblage of the most professional of professionals, it emerged that even these folk are as confused by the cross-currents of popular opinion as anyone else. There was no concerted move to reject either Nixon or Humphrey, but neither was there much enthusiasm.

A Nixon versus Humphrey contest will induce such voter apathy that people are likely to stay away from the polls in droves, which in turn could enhance the chances of a rank outsider.

When one recalls that Wallace, with his simple appeal to the racism latent in lower and middle-income whites who are fed up with the pace and thrust of Negro advance, has polled better than 30 per cent. in several Northern States, it is easy to see why he now has to be taken seriously. If a fourth party comes on the scene, with either McCarthy or Rockefeller or even the pair of

hich
 as a
 Lord
 der-
 my.
 tted
 sum-
 d as

hese
 me
 hap-
 not
 they
 He
 ff-
 ent
 rid
 ra-
 ted

ese
 nd
 'ch
 ist
 nd

res
 ive
 the
 life
 ub-
 ese
 ling

the
 As
 n a
 iing

expect a freakish Presidential year.
both major parties is not ruled out

VOTERS'

from **STEPHEN BARBER**

them in double harness as its White House entry, it might well take away so many votes from the old dominant parties as to enhance the position of the angry Alabaman even further.

Predictably enough, pious affirmations have come from both sides that neither will make a deal with Wallace. But just how far politicians are prepared to go in their search for a winning formula can be judged from the serious consideration that was given by certain of Humphrey's big backers one night this week to the weird idea that he might invite Rockefeller to be his Vice-President, which would be like Ted Heath's offering to make Michael Foot Chancellor.

Most of the Democrat Governors wanted to dragoon Senator Edward Kennedy as Humphrey's "Veep." But, after some hawing, Kennedy has now flatly ruled the idea out. Humphrey, I understand, feels that without the endorsement of the last of the Kennedy brothers, he is going to have a very hard fight on his hands, and could even lose. But he was reluctant to press him to accept the Vice-Presidency lest some madman should thereupon decide to assassinate him in his turn.

"The Kennedys have suffered

enough," he told friends, "I couldn't have a thing like that on my conscience!"

On Nixon's side efforts to find a glamorous running mate are only slightly less anguished. But that he needs one is generally conceded by his followers, which is scarcely flattering and rather suggests that if he fails to win the G.O.P. nomination on the first ballot at its Convention he may be cheated of the prize just when it seemed in his grasp.

What the hard-headed "pols" of both parties at Cincinnati also found in common was that public discontent over Vietnam and the race issue in its various manifestations is such that neither will stay swept under the rug for long. California's Governor Ronald Reagan, who patently hopes to elbow Nixon aside in the event of a deadlock at Miami and be named for the White House himself, is almost the last of the true hawks apart from Wallace, and that fact is now adjudged his Achilles heel.

In the eyes of the pros around Humphrey, Americans have so turned off on the war that the Vice-President's worst liability is his loyalty to Johnson. It is even being energetically canvassed that Humphrey should resign as Vice-President right now in order to

make a clean and public break with the President.

The pros admit privately that Humphrey is doomed if the Republicans should by some incredible fluke nominate Rockefeller. But even against Nixon, unless he can corral a substantial segment of the anti-war vote, he is in bad trouble.

McCarthy is giving no quarter. He knows he has his fellow Minnesotan on the ropes over Vietnam, and this week at one mass rally after another he pounded into him mercilessly on the subject, promising to keep at it not only until the Chicago party Convention but also on into November—and beyond.

It was singularly striking that this pledge to hammer away on the Vietnam issue even after the nominating Convention and the elections proper, with its broad hint that the speaker would be ready to lead a fourth party when the time is ripe, invariably drew the loudest and longest, most fervent and even frenzied applause at his meetings.

As the Republicans' Dove, Rockefeller is getting big crowds too. But it is surely highly significant that at this stage the only entrant in the presidential race to generate comparable enthusiasm to that accorded McCarthy as "the man the people chose" is George Wallace, though naturally the enthusiasm comes from a different type of crowd. And what is scaring the backroom strategists of both the traditional parties equally about this phenomenon is what Wallace and McCarthy have in common: both appeal to elements in America today that reject the old Establishment and the practice of consensus government-by-compromise.

A polarisation of American politics around Left and Right groupings might seem to make more sense than the present uniquely fuzzy arrangement. But for the pros it means changing the habits and patterns of a lifetime, a thought they do not much like.