

McCarthy Rode an Idea Whose Time Had Come

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CHICAGO—With the benefit of hindsight, one could assume that Eugene J. McCarthy went as far as he did this year for two reasons—the breaks of history and his own enlightened calculation.

He rode an idea whose time had come, but it was he, and not the more "practical" politicians who guessed correctly that the time really had come.

When McCarthy announced last November, he seemed an improbable candidate holding onto an impossible issue. He was little known outside of Washington and Minnesota. He had made no spectacular record in the Senate. He was, his colleagues testified, lazy.

Moreover, there was little indication that public opinion would support a peace candidate, despite the grow-

ing disenchantment with the war in Vietnam. A poll published five days after he announced his candidacy showed that 63 per cent of the people preferred Mr. Johnson and only 17 per cent favored McCarthy.

There is evidence to indicate that McCarthy himself did not take himself seriously as a candidate in the early days. He had begun by traveling the college campuses and talking with a few labor leaders and politicians. An aide recalled recently that McCarthy then—in August, three months before his announcement—seemed only to hope that many Senators and Governors could be induced to stand as favorite-son candidates, withholding their sup-

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McCARTHY, From A1

port of the President until he changed directions on Vietnam.

McCarthy did little to dispose of the notion that he was not serious. Reporters would ask if he really wanted to be President. He would be willing, McCarthy replied. Did he think he would make a good President? He thought he would be adequate, he said. To audiences he would confide that his childhood ambition was not to be President, but to play first base for the New York Yankees.

The casual, almost indifferent manner concealed a grain of toughness, however, that his opponents failed to consider. For example, supporters of Robert F. Kennedy predicted confidently that McCarthy would fade away when their man announced in March. They were surprised when he didn't, and embittered when McCarthy turned a scathing attack on Kennedy in the California primary.

They might have been bet-

ter informed had they read a magazine article McCarthy wrote early in 1968. If Kennedy planned to make his own challenge, McCarthy wrote, "... he will have a fight on his hands to see who has the most strength. I will not step aside voluntarily."

In the end it seemed that all of McCarthy's enemies—Kennedy, the President, Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey—misjudged him. White House political aides confidently predicted that McCarthy's challenge would rebound to Mr. Johnson's benefit, giving the President a chance to demonstrate the essential weakness of the anti-war forces. By March 10, Mr. Johnson was out of the running.

Much of the press, too, misjudged the candidate. Reporters found him an uninspiring speaker. His speeches sounded like college lectures. His manner was a blend of wit, whimsy and waspishness that delighted his admirers, but seemed bound to discourage a mass audience.

To such criticism, McCarthy acidly replied, "I

don't really intend to shout at people. I don't think the issues I'm raising are served by that kind of emotion."

His smartest political followers now believe, and with good cause, that McCarthy's unemotional demeanor was a major asset. The country was tired of "shouters." Furthermore, the style differentiated his campaign from those of the radical anti-war blocs that wanted to fight the issue in the streets.

McCarthy was not the first choice of those who searched for an anti-Administration candidate. Allard K. Lowenstein and Curtis Gans, two anti-war Democrats determined to test the issue in their own Party, went first to Robert Kennedy, only to be told their mission was hopeless. They turned next to McCarthy and George McGovern, but the latter said he had to concentrate on his own reelection in 1968. Only McCarthy was left and, he finally accepted the role with many doubts and qualms.

On Nov. 30, McCarthy announced he would enter four Democratic primaries and possibly two others. He was running, he said, to raise the issue of Vietnam and to challenge "the President's position" on the war. Nowhere did he say he was really seeking the Democratic nomination. He would campaign because, "I am concerned that the Administration seems to have set no limits on the price that it will pay for military victory."

The Administration's response was instant. McCarthy was motivated by personal pique, said some, because he was passed over for the vice presidential nomination in 1964. In New Hampshire, where the first primary test came, Gov. John W. King called McCarthy an advocate of "appeasement" and "surrender" in Vietnam. Sen. Thomas J. McIntyre, who six months later was to make his own break with the Administration's war policy, called McCarthy an "apostle of retreat."

Then came election night, March 12, and the national political scene was changed sharply, like a kaleidoscope suddenly twisted. Instead of taking 10 or 20 per cent of the vote, as most observers had speculated, McCarthy took 42 per cent, enough to

claim one of the major upsets of American politics.

He had been aided significantly by events 10,000 miles away. In the weeks preceding the primary, the Vietcong had launched their highly successful attack on major South Vietnamese cities. Suddenly it seemed that reports that the United States and South Vietnam were winning the war had been grossly exaggerated. McCarthy's warning that

this country was bogged down in an endless war took on new credence. It was the one great historic "break" of the McCarthy campaign, and suddenly he was a prophet of considerable honor.

After New Hampshire, the McCarthy campaign was like a rollercoaster, rising to peaks of victory and diving to the pits of defeat. Into the race bounded Kennedy, with all the money and staff and prestige it takes to win

elections. Angered and personally hurt, McCarthy vowed he would stay in until the end.

Then came Wisconsin and McCarthy's clearest victory of the year, and the dramatic moment two days be-

fore the primary when President Johnson announced he would not accept renomination. Wisconsin proved two things about the McCarthy campaign that made politicians take serious notice for the first time in the year.

First, the power of mass popular participation in a campaign was demonstrated beyond doubt. More than 7000 young students poured into the state, rang virtually every doorbell, and pulled out thousands of voters who

otherwise would have stayed home.

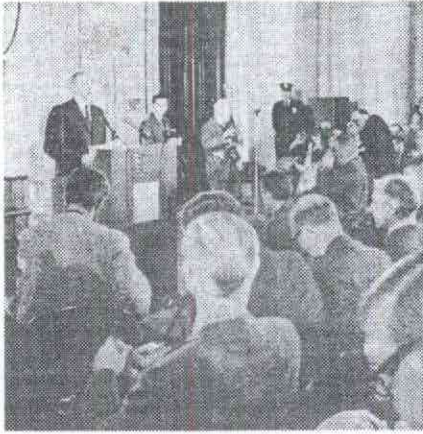
Second, McCarthy emerged from Wisconsin with the votes of thousands of Independents and Republicans. That message—that he could pull from normally

non-Democratic precincts—was to become McCarthy's best political weapon among the doubting Democratic bosses around the country.

And it was in Wisconsin that McCarthy finally moved to dispel the notion that he was not seriously driving for the presidential nomination. In one of his most important speeches, delivered to Milwaukee businessmen at the Pfister Hotel, McCarthy proclaimed that no one should doubt that his campaign was designed to control the presidency.

For the rest of the year, McCarthy's campaign was of lesser importance. He lost badly to Kennedy in Indiana and Nebraska, rose for one final victory in Oregon, then lost—but by a narrow margin—in California, the day before Kennedy was assassinated. Oregon demonstrated his continued attraction for white, middle-class audiences already receptive to anti-war appeals. California demonstrated that he could not match Kennedy in lower economic class neighborhoods.

By the time the Democratic National Convention has begun, however, McCarthy—with Kennedy gone from the scene—had picked up support in quarters where he had not been popular before. Somehow, throughout the turbulent year he had attracted one of the most widely based followings of any American politician.



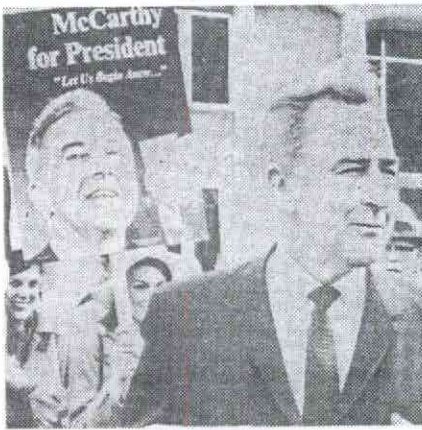
Announcement



New Hampshire



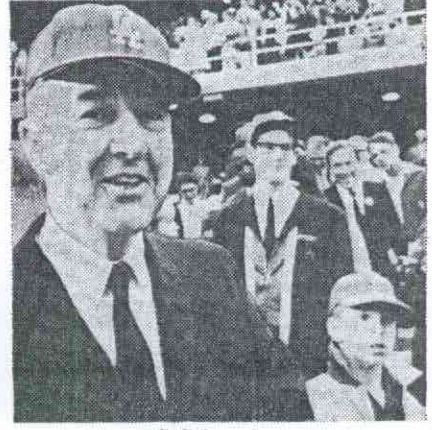
Indiana



Wisconsin



Oregon



California



Nebraska



Kennedy Debate