

Maryland Affairs

Voice of the People Silent in



By
**Richard
Homan**

ONE OF THE clearest lessons emerging from the muddled week in Chicago is that delegates from states with presidential primary elections vote in a far different fashion than those from states without primaries.

Maryland's votes at the Democratic National Convention, for example, were

cast with very little concern for knowledge about which candidate the State's Democratic citizens might want, had they been asked.

If the overwhelming vote cast for Hubert H. Humphrey was representative of the views of the Maryland people, it was accidental. The people had played no part in the selection of the delegates or in the determination of their presidential choice.

Two forces are at work that will alter this by 1972: a convention rule change that will require public participation in the selection of delegates and State legislative pressure for restoring Maryland's presidential primary.

In the Chicago convention, the difference in voting patterns between states with presidential primaries and those who had none was astonishing.

TWELVE STATES had primaries that, in one way or another, let the citizens select candidates or delegates or simply let the candidates and delegates know who and what the citizens supported.

On the roll call vote for the presidential nominee, Humphrey got 356 votes from these 12 states while his opponents received 536.

Humphrey won nomination by piling up a 5-to-1 margin in the 36 states that

have no primaries, where selection of delegates is under the close control of the Democratic organization.

Even more telling was the vote on the dovish minority plank on Vietnam. Here again, delegates selected by the people reflected a far different attitude than delegates selected by the politicians.

In the 12 states with primaries, the antiwar plank was approved, 597 to 289. But in the other states, it was rejected by a 3-to-1 margin.

THIS ALIENATION of politicians from their electorate was forecast a week before the convention by the

Democratic Delegate Setup

Commission on the Democratic Selection of Presidential Nominees, established by convention delegates to study the delegate selection process.

"This convention is on trial," the Commission warned. "We have concluded that state systems for selecting delegates to the Democratic National Convention and the procedures of the convention itself display considerably less fidelity to basic democratic principles than a nation which claims to govern itself can fairly tolerate."

Maryland's delegation cast 45 of its 49 votes for Humphrey and gave two each to Sens. George McGovern and

Eugene McCarthy. It voted 37 to 12 in favor of the majority plank on Vietnam.

The delegation may have come close to reflecting the views of Maryland's Democrats on the war, but there is no question that the 92 per cent support of Humphrey was overdone.

Maryland's primary, shifted from May to September three years ago, comes too late to include presidential contests or selection of convention delegates for either party.

THE PROBLEM was underscored last winter by a Montgomery County attorney, John Silard, who lost a court suit aimed at giving

rank and file Democrats more of a voice in choosing delegates.

Silard, a McCarthy backer, sought a special election in which voters would choose delegates to the State convention. These delegates, in turn, would have chosen Maryland's representatives to the Chicago convention.

Under the system used this year, delegates were chosen by a State convention made up of the 142 regional party central committee members elected in 1966. The only public participation in the entire selection process was the election of these committee members two years before candidates

were known or issues had unfolded.

Besides delegates chosen in this manner, 12 of the Maryland delegation—one-fourth the total—were automatic selections because of their public or party offices.

The National Convention rules amendment, adopted as a minority proposal, will force Maryland to devise a new method.

BESIDES BANNING the unit rule at any stage of delegate selection, the new rule states: "It is the further understanding that a state Democratic party, in selecting and certifying delegates to the Democratic National

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Convention thereby undertakes to assure that all Democrats of the state will have meaningful and timely opportunities to participate fully in the election or selection of such delegates and alternates."

The rule states that this public participation must take place within the year of the presidential election. Some party officials think it will also prohibit automatic selection of public officials as delegates.

Drafters of the new rule

said they specifically intended that delegates must not be chosen before the election campaign unfolds and that delegates hand-picked by party leaders without a primary or open convention should no longer be admitted.

To meet the requirements of this rule, Maryland's Legislative Council, the interim study arm of the General Assembly, has scheduled a hearing Sept. 20 in Annapolis to examine proposals for restoring the spring primary and democratizing the

method of selecting delegates.

State Senate President William S. James, chairman of the Council's subcommittee on elections, has said that the Council is prepared to make radical changes in the present system.

One possibility that will be given serious consideration, he said, is the so-called Oregon and Nebraska, in all-star primary now used in which names of all apparent contenders are placed on the ballot and can be withdrawn only by an affidavit of noncandidacy.