

Part 9/9/78

The Fauntroy-Tucker Vote Fiasco

HOW CURIOUS—and unfair—that Walter Fauntroy should point a political finger of blame at Walter Washington for what happened to the D.C. voting representation amendment in the California legislature. What happened, you may recall, was that Mr. Fauntroy, heady with the congressional approval of the amendment, decided to go west in person, dragging along his hand-picked candidate for mayor, Sterling Tucker, to beat the drums in Sacramento for instant ratification. That ill-advised, self-serving exercise boomeranged—and the amendment decision was set aside by the state legislature.

Only now, in the last week of the campaign, we find Mr. Fauntroy trying to shift the blame to Mayor Washington. The Fauntroy claim is that Mr. Washington was publicly supporting ratification of the amendment while his aides were lobbying the California legislators in an effort to postpone ratification and thus minimize the political benefits that Mr. Tucker might have reaped if the measure had passed. According to Mr. Fauntroy, California Assemblyman Willie Brown “explicitly heard an aide [of Gov. Jerry Brown] tell the governor that ‘Mayor Washington was on the phone mad as hell that you are going to meet with Tucker and Fauntroy, and asking you not to take pictures with them.’”

Certainly this third-hand account is no proof that Mayor Washington or persons in his camp were undermining passage of the amendment. In any case, Messrs. Fauntroy and Tucker clearly were there trying to exploit the California vote for their own personal political benefit—and never mind at what risk to the amendment itself—so one can understand why

the mayor or any other opponent might say so. In fact, another candidate did. Republican Arthur Fletcher noted in a television interview that although he and other local Republicans had worked hard to muster GOP support in Congress, Mr. Fauntroy and Mr. Tucker went to California without even asking a Republican to go along, and thus, so far as the California legislators were concerned, “instantly turned it into a partisan issue. . . . a very dangerous way to play with something that the people of the District of Columbia have hoped for—for years.”

It is dangerous, all right, for already the Fauntroy-Tucker fiasco and the national spotlight have followed the amendment to the Delaware legislature, which also failed to ratify. And now there is a chance it will be brought up next week in New Jersey, and that Mr. Fauntroy will appear there, despite his pious-sounding recommendation this week of a moratorium on lobbying until after Tuesday's primary. Actually, there should be a moratorium—until Mr. Fauntroy and Mr. Tucker can consult with the effective coalition of national and local organizations that has served the cause of District representation so well so far.

—To grandstand around the nation with political allies and/or to cast the D.C. vote amendment as a racial issue is not only dangerous but wrong. And of all people, Mr. Fauntroy—who stands to gain as much as anyone if voting seats in the House and Senate are opened up for the District—should know better. There is time to plan a reasoned approach to the question in the states, without any more of these damaging Fauntroy-Tucker sorties.