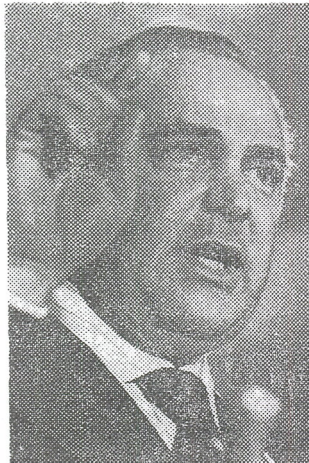


Democrats Whip Up Brouhaha



ROBERT S. STRAUSS
... wins a skirmish

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The Democrats have not lost their genius for picking fights with each other.

For the past four days, while most Washingtonians were off on vacation or enjoying the loveliest weather of the summer, the phone lines linking the Democratic National Committee, Capitol Hill, the AFL-CIO headquarters, the Baltimore, Chicago and Gary city halls and half a dozen state capitols have been singled by charges of "doublecross" and "sellout," hurled by one Democrat at another.

At the center of the maelstrom was a hitherto-ob-

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scure Chicago lawyer named Alex Seith, who may or may not be in line for the almost invisible job of vice chairman (or as some combatants would prefer, co-chairman) of the Democratic Party's Delegate Selection Commission.

Many of the participants in the brawl are political heavyweights: party Chairman Robert S. Strauss and his deputy, Robert J. Keefe, Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, the nationally ambitious governor of Illinois, Dan Walker, and Alexander

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E. Barkan, chairman of the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education.

The ferocity of the struggle reflected two things: the continuing bitterness of the internal divisions that exploded at last year's Democratic National Convention, and the rising tensions over next month's meeting of the Delegate Selection Commission, where 1976 convention reforms will again be up for debate, with no one certain of the outcome.

But, as reconstructed in yesterday's relative calm by many of the principals, the battle also showed how much emotion can be generated by seemingly inconsequential questions.

The story began earlier this month when Leonard Woodcock, president of the United Auto Workers, told Strauss the time demands of the current contract negotiations required him to give up his job as No. 2 man on the delegate commission.

Originally, Woodcock had been chairman of the commission, but last January, feeling time pressures, he decided to switch jobs with his co-chairman, Baltimore City Councilwoman Barbara

Mikulski, letting her take over the active leadership of the commission.

Since then Ms. Mikulski has been under steady criticism from AFL-CIO officials, who accuse her of representing the "new politics" forces responsible for the Govern.

nomination of George Meany. Their anger boiled over early this summer when she fired Doris Hardesty, an AFL-CIO staff member's wife, from the staff of her commission. After much pulling and hauling, labor generated enough heat on Strauss, Ms. Mikulski, and the Democratic National Committee to force Mrs. Hardesty's rehiring, with full back pay.

When word of Woodcock's desire to resign began to circulate, the AFL-CIO saw a chance to capture the co-chairman's job from the rival UAW and also to strengthen its chances of revising the reform guidelines written four years ago by the McGovern commission.

As their candidate, George Meany's operatives chose Seith, the chairman of the Cook County Zoning Board of Appeals, a political ally of Daley's, but a man who has also been a contributor to anti-Daley liberal Democrats in Illinois.

COPE's Barkan quickly won support for the plan from the mayor, who had suffered the public humiliation of having his delegation barred from the 1972 con-

vention in the most controversial application of the reform guidelines.

At that point, news of the plan leaked to a Chicago paper, where it was described as a scheme to put a Daley henchman in as co-chairman of the reform commission. That brought a complaint from Walker, the maverick governor who climbed to power last year over Daley's opposition.

It also alerted Ms. Mikulski, who promptly served notice that she would accept Seith as vice chairman of her commission but would not put up with the appointment of a co-chairman who shared power with her over staff and activities.

Ms. Mikulski says she received assurances that Strauss never intended Seith to be co-chairman; that the vacancy was in the vice chairmanship, and that was the job to be filled.

On the premise that it was a "largely ceremonial appointment," Ms. Mikulski withdrew her objections, and Democratic reformers gave Seith their blessing. Alan Baron, head of the unofficial Democratic Planning Group, a "new politics" organization anathema to both Strauss and Barkan, advised reform members of the Mikulski commission to hold their fire. A top aide to Walker told Illinois Democratic fund-raiser Angelo Geocarj the Seith appointment had been cleared.

But when word got back to Barkan and Daley of this sudden collapse of opposition, they smelled a rat. On Wednesday, Barkan called Keefe, who had been handling most of the negotiations for the vacationing Strauss, and demanded to know what was going on.

"Co-chairman, vice chairman, what's the big difference?" Keefe reportedly asked. Barkan said there was a world of difference and hollered foul.

Alerted by Barkan, Daley reportedly called in to say

that if his man was not given co-equal status with Ms. Mikulski, he might pull Chicago out of next month's Democratic telethon, Strauss' pet project.

Nonetheless, an announcement of Seith's appointment as vice chairman was being prepared on Thursday, when Walker suddenly switched signals and—at an afternoon press conference—called on his fellow governors to join him in opposing Seith and supporting, instead, Gary's black mayor, Richard Gordon Hatcher.

Walker's move changed the picture for everyone else. Instead of a potentially serious showdown with Barkan and Daley, Strauss now confronted an angry governor, but one without many allies in the national Democratic Party. As of yesterday, Walker's aides said he had heard from only two governors—both on Strauss' side of the fight.

Daley, instead of pressuring Strauss for the co-chairman's job for Seith, called Barkan yesterday to say his main interest now was in overriding Walker's veto, and thereby demonstrating to Illinois Democrats that the mayor had more power than the governor in the national Democratic Party.

Under the circumstances, Barkan agreed that the fight for co-chairman would be futile, but still insisted he had been double-crossed.

That left Walker the only apparent loser—and some Illinois observers said they thought he had achieved his real goal by dramatizing his opposition to Daley before whatever national audience was watching this peculiar drama.

Ms. Mikulski said she was happy with the outcome, but one question was bothering her: "I don't know whether Strauss had the authority to make the appointment."

All this, she said, "has come about very quickly, with no real consultation with me. I never even got a letter of resignation from Woodcock."