

Democratic Chairman May Resign

By William Chapman
Washington Post Staff Writer

Democratic National Chairman Jean Westwood has indicated she may be willing to resign if an acceptable candidate committed to continuing party reforms is available to replace her.

Some of her associates are trying to build up a candidacy for George J. Mitchell, a national committeeman from Maine and once the presidential campaign director for Sen. Edmund S. Muskie.

Meanwhile, Gov. George C. Wallace moved into the growing national committee struggle, hoping to influence its membership, the selection of new members, and the choice of a new chairman. Aides said he favors Robert S. Strauss of Texas for the chairmanship.

Wallace sent one of his top former campaign aides, Michael Griffin, to open a Washington office and begin contacting national committee members, who will meet here on Dec. 9.

On that day, organized labor, several governors and others hostile to Mrs. Westwood will attempt to force her to vacate the chairmanship. They prefer someone not associated with the campaign of Sen. George McGovern and, in labor's case, someone not determined to maintain the party's reform rules.

Until yesterday, Mrs. Westwood had insisted she would remain as chairman and claimed she had counted enough votes to keep the job if it came to a showdown in the national committee.

But yesterday she issued a statement saying that her own future "is subordinate to considerations about the future of the party." It said that she will consult with Democratic office-holders and other members and groups in order to build up the party. "I have until Dec. 9 to decide how my own future as chairman of the Democratic National Commit-

See DEMOCRATS, A8, Col. 6

DEMOCRATS, From A1

tee fits into these considerations," her statement said.

Associates said that although no explicit agreement has been reached Mrs. Westwood is willing to step aside in favor of Mitchell, with whom she met here yesterday.

These aides believe that Mitchell would be more acceptable to traditional power blocs in the party, such as labor and state officials, and could be elected without a bruising confrontation.

He also appeals to the McGovern faction because he firmly supported the reform rules adopted by the party. He was a member of the commission, headed by McGovern, which forced state parties to change the method of selecting delegates to nominating conventions.

Mitchell has long been associated with Muskie's campaigns and the building of the Democratic Party in Maine. He once was Muskie's administrative assistant in the Senate.

Now a lawyer in Portland, Mitchell, 39, has been mentioned as a possible candidate for either governor or Congress. Last week, in Maine, he described himself as being "tired of politics" and said he would be content to practice law for a while.

Whether Mitchell would really be acceptable to the anti-McGovern faction was an open question yesterday. Maine Gov. Kenneth Curtis, a close friend of Mitchell, sounded out several governors and found them "non-committal."

"Most of the governors are playing it cool," Curtis said. "They want to see if they can't get one of their own elected." The governors are hoping to build support for either former Gov. Robert McNair of South Carolina or Gov. Warren Hearnes of Missouri, whose term expires this year.

The chairman of the Democratic governor's caucus, Gov. Dale L. Bumpers of Arkansas, said in Little Rock yesterday that he was aware of efforts to reach a compromise on the chairmanship. But he said any compromise in which Mrs. Westwood wished to resign and name her own successor would be unsatisfactory. The governor's caucus has insisted that she resign.

Mrs. Westwood's aides con-

tinued to assert yesterday that she could win any floor fight against a faction backing Strauss, the Dallas lawyer who has been party treasurer. But she would be willing to step aside to avoid a new party split if someone like Mitchell can amass support for the job.

Wallace's move into the arena was his first attempt to affect the direction of the national party since he was shot during the presidential primaries last spring.

Joseph Azbel, Wallace's campaign director of communications, said the recuperating governor would insist that

Mrs. Westwood resign and that the party reform rules be abandoned because "those were what led to the defeat" in the past election.

Charles Snider, Wallace's campaign director, said the only man the governor now supports for the chairmanship is Strauss. Azbel said Wallace "doesn't know that much about Mitchell."

A top Wallace goal, Azbel said, would be to influence selection of the national committee's additional 25 members, a bloc that could control the committee's direction, key, closely-contested issues. There is a possibility that Wallace will come to Washington during the week of the national committee's meeting, December, Azbel said.