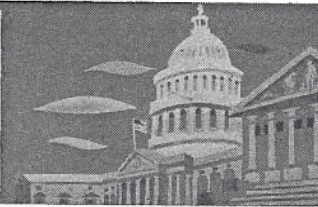


State of Affairs



Robert Kennedy Moves Up

WASHINGTON. SENATOR Robert Kennedy's political safari to South Africa has once again aroused a mixture of admiration, jealousy, and political nervousness along Pennsylvania Avenue (not to mention outrage in Pretoria)—and what better testimony could there be for an ambitious politician than to know that every one of his steps is followed with the utmost attention? For attention, after all, is what every successful politician feeds on.

The admiration the Senator earns is engendered by his unerring instinct for getting onto the front pages, and by the quality of his speeches, which enable him to leap the old New Frontier, onto fresh ground that keeps him a jump ahead of his rivals. The jealousy is aroused by his success, especially in a Washington more conscious than ever of polls, and by the financial means at his disposal, which relieve him from worry over the dreary and tiresome business of fund-raising.

That all this should add up to uneasiness at some of the nerve centers of the Democratic Party is not surprising. But is it sensible? The party should be pleased: The more talent, the more choice there is, the more vigorous the party will be. Republicans are uncomfortable for exactly the opposite reason; they are very much aware of the scarcity within their party of talent with national appeal.

Robert Kennedy's standing in the country is a bit of a political phenomenon. There is, of course, the name; the still vivid mystique of his late brother; a certain charm; and his good looks. But all that is not enough. The fact is that Bobby has now created a political base for himself. He seems to have decided that his future depends on the young, on the next generation. He sees the world, and therefore the United States, too, as moving inexorably to the Left, and he is paving for himself a path, however narrow, along that broad middle road President Johnson occupies.

He is making great strides in pre-empting as his own the nation's aspirations for the future. Yet Kennedy has found enough room for his own brand of liberalism. Some of the old ADA hands are still a little puzzled by the late recruit, but they accept the Senator's own explanation, which he gave at one of their rallies in New York when he said

he had debated ADA liberalism with Professor Arthur Schlesinger for years, and concluded: "He won and I am here."

James Rauh, one of the ADA old hands, remarked the other day: "What encourages me about Bobby is that he should think liberalism is the wave of the future." It is always easier, of course, to espouse ideas than to show results, but it is exactly by sketching a political platform through speeches, political forays, and carefully targeted criticisms of official policy that a politician with high ambitions paves his future.

Kennedy has been critical of the bombing of North and South Vietnam; he has called for a new approach to China; he wants the government to press harder for a non-proliferation treaty; he has been trying to inject new meaning into the Alliance for Progress, and he tries to trump the President's Great Society program. He has made as his own the causes close to the heart of the new generation. And so Robert Kennedy seems to gain increasing acceptance as something of a symbol of the concerns of this new group of young people.

When he flies in the face of South African political prejudice and accepts an invitation from a multi-racial student organization; when the South African government first hesitates, then agrees to give him a visa, but still seeks to impede press coverage of his trip; when he braves flying eggs in Latin America, or returns to the University of Mississippi he once assaulted with his federal marshals (when he was Attorney General, to pry open the door for the first Negro student)—all these things look to many political old-timers like publicity stunts. But to the new generation it is a display



of courage and enterprise and makes him part of what Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara the other day called the "age of protest."

Neither the President nor the Vice President is an old man. But both have been part of the American political scene for so long that they seem to belong to a much older generation than they in fact do—at least in the eyes of students today. They are also involved in an unpopular war that chiefly affects the lives of this new generation, which has heard so many pledges and assurances that war would not recur that many of its members are more than ever disenchanted.

They hear oft-quoted precedents, as Munich or the Greek Communist guerrilla war, but the historic parallels so frequently mentioned by those defending the Vietnamese war have for them little meaning. It is a vastly different generation from the graduates of even ten years ago—a far more serious, much less selfish group who are not as single-minded about their careers or finding a secure haven in some executive swivel chair. Their sense of personal security has been affected by two explosions: the nuclear bomb and the rebellion of the Negro inside the United States. To this younger generation, therefore, the swivel chair looks less secure, and its members feel strongly about most of the themes raised by Robert Kennedy in his speeches. And so the differences in age, understanding, outlook, priorities, and the usual impatience of youth all combine to emphasize the "generation gap" between the President and Robert Kennedy, and at that level it seems to be to the Senator's advantage.

Donald Graham, editor of the Harvard *Crimson*, said the other day, "Harvard is wildly enthusiastic about Kennedy"; and such Congressmen as Don Edwards and Jeffrey Cohelan, whose districts are close to the University of California, have both preferred to invite Theodore Sorensen and Robert Kennedy, rather than Vice President Humphrey, to help them raise funds.

Kennedy is driving himself hard. Clearly he does not think he can afford to waste time. He, more than anybody else, knows that history is unpredictable. His next obvious chance is not until 1972, but he may also want to make certain that if Mr. Humphrey does find himself in the White House sooner, by some fluke of history, and it falls to him to select a new Vice President, Kennedy could not easily be passed over once again.

Whatever the outcome of this competition within the Democratic Party, Robert Kennedy has already created a separate if limited source of power—quite a feat considering the powerful personality of the President.

—HENRY BRANDON.

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