

S, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1968

Cambridge, Mass.: The Kennedy Liberals at Harvard

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CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Jan. 23

—There is a serious political and philosophical argument going on here among the Kennedy liberals at Harvard. It is not the tiresome personal dispute that we are having in Washington between President Johnson and the Kennedy clan, but an argument among the Kennedy supporters about Presidential power, the condition of the nation and whether Senator Robert Kennedy of New York can do anything about these things.

The Kennedy-Johnson feud is, of course, very much in evidence here, and there is a group of Kennedy lovers and Johnson haters, some of them former aides to President Kennedy, who are using Harvard as a comfortable launching pad for blasting the Johnson Administration out of power. But the issue is much wider and deeper than that.

The Dilemma

The Kennedy liberals came out of the New Deal tradition and many of them have argued for years for a "strong Presidency." Now they find themselves in the awkward position of not liking what President Johnson has done with Presidential power in Vietnam, and yet not knowing quite how to

limit his power in order to change the policies they oppose.

That is one part of the argument here. The liberals are now trying to restrain the very powers they wanted in the past, and don't know how to do it.

More important, they are as troubled about how to challenge President Johnson on political grounds as they are on how to challenge him on constitutional grounds.

For the present, the Kennedy supporters are not only arguing among themselves about whether Senator Robert Kennedy of New York should or should not challenge the President for the Democratic nomination, but are writing essays and lawyer's briefs on the topic, pro and con.

Arthur Schlesinger Jr., for example, has written a paper arguing that Senator Kennedy should take the risk. Theodore Sorensen has composed the argument against. Richard Neustadt has taken the position that Bobby is trapped for the present and will be effective again politically only when he accepts the fact of his dilemma.

Thus, President John F. Kennedy's two principal biographers differ on the correct role for President Kennedy's brother Robert to take, with Soren-

sen thinking the risk of running is too great and Schlesinger insisting that the risk of not running, which might cost him the support of the young, is even greater.

About the only thing they all agree on is that President Johnson should go down in history as a political accident between the two Kennedy Presidencies, and that Senator Kennedy should at least get ready to run, just in case President Johnson decides at the last minute not to seek re-election.

The Emotional Climate

What seems even clearer here than in Washington is that Senator Kennedy has not decided the question, which is why the barrage of arguments from here continues, and the feeling runs so deep on the subject that it has apparently divided the Kennedy supporters and even the Kennedy family.

It seems fairly clear that very few Kennedy supporters here think the Senator could take the nomination away from President Johnson, or that he could avoid splitting his party if he tried to do so. The argument for trying is more complicated. It is that the war in Vietnam and its consequences on the home front are morally wrong and should be opposed by people who believe they are

wrong, as Robert Kennedy certainly does.

This is a serious argument because it is a conflict of principles. One principle is that a man should back his beliefs if he thinks the present policies will divide and weaken the nation at home and in its relations with the rest of the world. The other principle is that a man should support his party in a crisis, even if he disagrees with it, especially if there is a serious prospect that his opposition would shatter his party and might even open the way for a more hawkish Administration in Washington than the present.

The balance in this debate seems to run against an open challenge by Kennedy. This is not an argument here at Harvard between academic amateurs, but between men who have had a great deal of experience in Washington, know the political skill and constitutional power of the President, and therefore are trying to reconcile their wishes and the forces on the other side.

So far they have not been able to do so. They are the saddest and most frustrated participants on the American political scene today, but they are arguing about serious things and at least they agree that Kennedy should remain available until the California Presidential primary.