

Clark as the FBI Chief?

WASHINGTON—Anyone who knows Ramsey Clark knows that he is one of the most decent, compassionate men ever to hold office in this town, where deceit, ruthlessness, cruelty are so commonplace. Few men ever moved from a Deep South heritage to work so hard for racial justice.

Clark has an elite family background of prestige and affluency (father Tom Clark is a former Attorney General and a former Supreme Court Justice). Without pretense, Ramsey Clark is by choice a champion of the weak, the poor, the voiceless.

IT IS NOT surprising, then, that Clark would come home from North Vietnam deploring the "massive and destructive" bombing. He has cried out against the destruction, as would millions of other Americans were they to see what the bombing is doing. And in doing so, Ramsey Clark has suddenly become an election issue.

Sen. George McGovern has said in advance, unwisely perhaps, that if elected he might name Clark head of the FBI, or to some other top post. This throws an unfortunate political smell over Clark's assertion that if McGovern is elected, American prisoners of war will be released. For Clark, who is a fine human being but a lousy politician, this subtlety would scarcely have been obvious.

Suddenly the national debate is over whether Clark is a softheaded bumbler who was "used" by Hanoi, or whether he is a traitor, and most pointedly over whether he is the kind of man Americans want heading the FBI.

Personal knowledge and admiration of Clark aside, this looks like bad politics for the Democrats.

Edward J. Kiernan, president of the International Conference of Police Associations, has already leaped out to attack Clark, to declare that Americans don't want Clark as FBI director, a "sensitive position requiring a top mind and stern attitude." He accuses Clark of running "around the globe without portfolio, undermining the honest efforts of the United States government to end this war."

McGovern knows, then, that in addition to defending himself against charges of being a wild-eyed radical, he now must defend Ramsey Clark, whom he hasn't really appointed to anything. He must realize that Nixon will unleash Vice President Agnew, and Sen. Robert Dole, and his campaign chief, Clark MacGregor, to try to drape the McGovern forces in the bunting of treason.

To be perfectly honest, I suspect that the Nixon forces will get the best of this confrontation. The ruthless attacker usually does in the gentle humanitarian.

BUT THIS COLUMNIST admits that he has been wrong before, so this crazily unorthodox McGovern crowd might discover a way to turn the Clark trip into a political asset.

If that happens, I hope I'm quick to admit that I misjudged and underestimated the intelligence, the judgment, the compassion of the American people.