

Wallace's 'Grand Design' for '76

MONTGOMERY, Ala.—Confounding the hopes of Democratic leaders, Gov. George Wallace is slowly committing himself not to any ephemeral third party presidential race in 1976 but to a drive for power within the Democratic Party centered on 24 presidential primaries.

With the sudden power vacuum created by the "no draft" withdrawal of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the spectre so hideous to the national Democratic Party of Wallace rampant in the spring primaries begins to take threatening shape. Only Wallace now has a hard-core, dedicated national constituency.

At the least, this distorts Democratic primaries across the country. At the worst, it means Wallace may well enter the convention with the largest single bloc of first-ballot votes—largest by far, perhaps.

If so, he would then be a Trojan horse inside the Democratic convention in position to make this demand: Make me your Vice Presidential nominee—or else.

The "or else" is now being plotted by Wallace's top political operatives, headed by Charles Snider—not yet as a certainty but as a contingency. If the party refused to give Wallace the second spot on the ticket (a refusal which today would be "assured"), Wallace would then walk out and take his place on state ballots as a third party nominee.

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Here enters the politically crucial question of *when* Wallace would bolt.

If he left the party in anger after the party's December mid-term convention in Kansas City, delighted Democratic leaders would be spared Wallace in the primaries and would expect him to drain conservative votes from the Republicans as in 1968.

But if Wallace bolts in the summer of 1976 after entering the national convention as front-runner following multiple primary triumphs, he could be perceived as a victim of party discrimination. In that case, the Republicans might well be helped in November. So, the Wallace threat is credible.

Moreover, Wallace can wait that long. Wallace planners say a dozen states have cleared legal third-party ballot positions for November, 1976. The designated party varies, carrying such labels as American Party, American-Independent Party and Courage Party. There will be many others—perhaps in all 50 states by 1976.

Wallace professes ignorance. "I don't

know anything about it," he told us in his therapeutic exercise-bedroom in the governor's mansion here.

Ordered by his doctors to bed to cure an incipient infection from removal of a tiny stitch, Wallace nevertheless looked healthier than when we saw him last spring. Obviously, all plans depend on his still questionable health.

Assured of reelection as governor Nov. 5, he is talking more philosophically these days, particularly about the economic crisis. Let inflation continue its present course, he said, and it will lead to a calamity—"the radicalization of the great middle class." With the U.S. now urbanized, he warned that the "cushion" for younger unemployed workers and their wives to return to the family farmstead to wait out the crisis no longer exists.

Wallace is searching for a Wallace economic plan. He scorns what is coming out of Washington, both from the White House and from Democratic leaders. Comparing the American con-

dition today to the decline and fall of the Roman empire, he sees an even more powerful Russia, a U.S. unable to affect the price of oil and at least two more years of runaway inflation.

Wallace's plan: An economic recovery program to take to the country. Considering Wallace's skill in offering simplistic, sugar-coated, often demagogic solutions, such a plan could have potent political force.

A new link to Richard Vignerie's right-wing fund-raising operations has regularized Wallace's campaign finances. His list of assured contributors, now over \$250,000, is expanding at the rate of \$100,000 a year. He took in a cool \$1 million the last nine months, much of it then rolled over to develop larger (fully computerized) contributor lists. No other Democrat has nearly so broad a money base.

Wallace plans to go—"quietly, I hope"—to the Kansas City convention. A private letter to major Wallace contributors mailed last week tells why: "Gov. Wallace is making plans to represent you and vigorously voice his objection to any plans for the adoption of a (party) charter that resembles the platform that came out of the 1972 convention."

He is constructing his grand design prudently, to the anguish of anti-Wallace party leaders who wish he would go third party well before 1976. "They're not afraid of me," he told us. "They're afraid of the people I represent."