

# Wallace's Threat to the GOP

The Democrats ought to feel glad that Gov. George Wallace refuses to take a loyalty oath to support the party and its presidential nominee next year. As of now the Democrats' best chance of victory in 1976 lies in Wallace's running as an independent candidate.

Instead of worrying about the Alabama governor's abandoning them, as he repeatedly threatens to do if he is not put on the ticket and if the platform doesn't please him, the Democrats should be encouraging, indeed prodding, him to get up and leave.

Wallace is often called a "spoiler," a "rule-or-ruin" politician, which is probably true, but it has wrongly been assumed that he is chiefly a problem for the Democrats, when by any realistic criterion it can be seen that he is a much greater danger to the GOP and its presidential nominee.

The main concern to the Democrats is not whether Wallace leaves but how. The "secret weapon" that the governor holds over the heads of the Democrats is not the threat of his heading up a third party, but the much worse threat of his simply going home and sitting out the campaign.

On the basis of the last two elections, as well as on what the various polls show, a Wallace dropout could be fatal for the Democrats, just as an independent race by the governor would probably wreck the chances of the GOP candidate.

The Democratic leaders have not forgotten that in 1968 Wallace took so many votes away from Richard Nixon that Hubert Humphrey came within

less than 1 per cent of winning, even though he carried only 13 states out of 50.

It is also still remembered that in 1972, just before Wallace was shot, the polls indicated a close race between Nixon and Sen. George McGovern. Prior to the assassination attempt, the relative standings were roughly Nixon 45 per cent, McGovern 40 per cent and Wallace 15 per cent.

After the Alabaman was knocked out of the race in mid-May, Nixon started climbing rapidly in the polls. He finally won the election by 60 per cent, indicating he got nearly all of the vote that otherwise would have gone to Wallace.

The most recent polls indicate that Wallace still has the power to pull many votes away from the Republican ticket. The latest Gallup Poll, for example, shows President Ford defeating Sen. Edward Kennedy by a small margin in a two-man race, but another Gallup Poll shows Kennedy winning big with Wallace in the race. The Alabaman's presence cost Mr. Ford 10 points, or enough to turn a political victory into a probable smashing defeat.

The same poll showed Wallace rolling up a strong 19 per cent vote for himself, or possibly enough to throw the election into the House of Representatives, where the Democrats enjoy a large majority, as they have for many years and doubtless will continue to.

In short, the better the governor runs, the better for the Democrats, for if a very large Wallace popular vote precluded any of the candidates win-

ning a majority of the electoral vote, as required by the Constitution, a Democratic victory would be guaranteed because neither Mr. Ford nor Wallace would have a chance of winning in the House of Representatives.

Mr. Ford has been recruiting some shrewd and experienced political advisers, who obviously perceive the danger of a Wallace candidacy. Every move made by the President recently has been designed to shore up his conservative flank and head off defections from the right wing of his party.

The worst of all worlds for Mr. Ford would be a Republican-oriented third party headed by Wallace or former California Gov. Ronald Reagan or both. The Alabaman apparently has already been flirting with the Washington-based Committee on Conservative Alternatives, a Republican group which regards Mr. Ford as not conservative enough.

A Wallace staff member is quoted as saying, "If we go the third-party route, we'll go mainly through the Washington group." As to a Reagan-Wallace or Wallace-Reagan ticket, this month's Wallace Stand, the official publication of the Wallace campaign, carries a photograph of the two men conversing chummily at a recent political rally in Alabama. The headline over the picture reads, "Anything Is Possible."

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Columnist Jerry V. Wilson is on vacation.