

The Conservative Swing: How Far Will It Go?

By JAMES RESTON

If you have any doubt about the political swing to the right in the United States, all you have to do is look around. The reaction has set in from California to New York, and the main question now is how far it will go.

The victory of Mayor Yorty of Los Angeles over Thomas Bradley, a Negro, is only the latest incident in the trend. Mr. Bradley got 47 per cent of the vote in a city that is only 18 per cent Negro, but Mayor Yorty's appeal to fear of the militant blacks plus the fear of anarchy on the University of California campus during the recent riots apparently brought out a large and decisive conservative majority in the end.

The New York Switch

The candidates for Mayor in New York City obviously see this same movement to the political right. Normally, in this most liberal of American cities, the demands of the Negroes and the poor would tend to be decisive with all but the most conservative politicians.

But after the recent turmoil in the city universities, where the Negroes demanded a separate system of admission for themselves, most of the candi-

dates for Mayor came out against the two-track system.

The headlines these days are a fairly accurate symbol of the trend to the right, which is interesting, for normally they dramatize the unusual rather than the usual. But for the present they are not a bad indicator of the reaction against power and violence.

The Pentagon, for example, which has been almost beyond criticism since the war, is now being criticized severely even on Capitol Hill.

The foundations which have used the accumulated private wealth of the capitalist system for social reconstruction and therefore have been regarded as a symbol of the liberal establishment, are now under attack and in danger of losing, not only some powers they didn't need, but some other authority which they clearly exercised in the national interest.

Probably the most obvious indication of the turn to the right was President Nixon's appointment of Warren Burger of Minnesota to be Chief Justice of the United States—and the hurrahs from the most conservative Southern chairmen in the Congress about the Burger appointment dramatized the point.

This trend, of course, has been coming on ever since the

march on the Pentagon long before Richard Nixon was elected to the Presidency. In fact, a good case can be made for the proposition that the militancy of the left at the Pentagon and at the Democratic convention in Chicago plus the defiant demands of the Negro militants were major and maybe even decisive factors in bringing the Republicans back to the White House.

The Moderate Hope

There is very little evidence, however, to suggest that this political movement to the right is about to produce a period of political and police repression. The President undoubtedly wanted a Chief Justice who was more conservative in dealing with accused criminals, but there is no reason to believe he wanted a hanging judge or that Judge Burger would accommodate him if Mr. Nixon did.

In fact, the present trend to the right is probably going faster than the President would approve, and there is little reason for believing that he has rejoiced in the re-election of Mayor Yorty in Los Angeles.

It is not the politicians who are driving the people to the right, but the people who are driving even liberal politicians in that direction. There is now

a fear of disorder and even of anarchy in the country. This does not mean that the American people are against greater equality for the Negro or more democracy for the students in the universities, but they seem to be saying quite clearly that the use of violence has gone too far—in Vietnam, in the cities and in the universities—and that this trend toward violence must be stopped as the first order of business.

How far this movement to the right goes will probably depend in large measure on how the Negro and campus militants react to the backlash. If they insist on more confrontations with the majority, and more violence, the danger of repression will be real and tragic for everybody concerned.

Much will depend on what the liberal professors do in the future. Many of them have been sitting on the barricades smoking their pipes and arguing about tactics, and the result of their action on the whole has been to encourage the militants. But now we are seeing that the political reaction in the country is not with the militants but against them, and this political trend to the right, if not carefully analyzed and corrected, could easily get out of hand.