

The Next Four Years

In less than six weeks, we, the American people, will be choosing the President and Vice President of the United States for the next four years. But we will be doing more than that; we will be determining whether we want this country to continue along the course it has been taking during the past four years, or whether we want to restore to American political life its traditional values of democratic liberalism and social concern.

In an America striving to realize its own vision of equality and liberty under the rule of law, the Presidency requires particular qualities of character, leadership and moral force that transcend the narrow bounds of personal ambition and of party politics. It requires a perception of the things that are wrong with America—politically, socially, economically, morally—as well as the things that are right; and a sense of priorities that gives precedence to human needs and public integrity over the panoply of wealth and the arrogance of power.

The New York Times urges the election of George McGovern for President of the United States. We believe that Senator McGovern's approach to public questions, his humanitarian philosophy and humane scale of values, his courage and his forthrightness can offer a new kind of leadership in American political life. We believe he can restore a sense of purpose to the American people as a whole, a sense of participation to their component parts and a sense of integrity to their Government.

In these respects, it seems to us, the Presidency of Richard M. Nixon has largely failed.

Mr. Nixon has indeed had his spectacular triumphs; and this newspaper has never hesitated to applaud the accomplishments of the President and his Administration when we thought that he was serving the best interests of the American people, even when in doing so he was adopting policies that he had spent a lifetime in opposing. But despite his best efforts—in regard to China, the Soviet Union, economic controls and so on—Mr. Nixon has failed both in principle and in practice in other areas of public policy even more vital than those in which he has scored his successes.

Not only has Mr. Nixon failed to carry out his explicit pledge to end the Vietnam conflict, on which he won the election by a hair's breadth four years ago; he has pursued a policy that appears to move in one direction while actually moving in another. Constantly emphasizing the winding down of the war and the withdrawal of American troops, Mr. Nixon has nevertheless enlarged the scope of hostilities, undertaken the biggest bombing campaign in history and committed American prestige to an increasingly authoritarian regime in Saigon.

The Vietnam war is but one area where President Nixon has failed either to carry out his pledge or to give the nation the moral and political leadership that would indeed unite us—as he promised to do four years ago. This Administration appears to be without basic philosophy, without deeply held values, an Administration whose guiding principle is expediency and whose overriding purpose is to remain in office.

The pursuit of excellence has been subordinated to pursuit of the next election, as evidenced by some of Mr. Nixon's appointments in such ultra-sensitive areas of Government as the Department of Justice and the Supreme Court. In many of its social, economic and fiscal policies; in lax standards of probity and truthfulness in

government; in favoritism toward special interests; in its addiction to secrecy; in its disregard of civil liberties and constitutional rights, the Nixon Administration has been a failure.

President Nixon has shown himself willing to exacerbate America's racial divisions for purely political purposes; he has countenanced and encouraged an ominous erosion of individual rights and First Amendment freedoms, and has demonstrated his indifference to such dangers by deliberately selecting Spiro T. Agnew as his potential successor to the Presidency. Protected by the White House curtain, he has stood above the political battle as the odor of corruption and of sleazy campaign practices rises above the Washington battlefield.

A McGovern administration. The Times believes, would reverse the unmistakable drift in Washington away from government of, by and for the people. It is undeniable that since his nomination Senator McGovern has been on the defensive, partly because of the Eagleton episode, partly because of ill-considered comments on specific points that he has subsequently modified or corrected, and partly because of the confused management of his own campaign. But on his record, and on what he has consistently stood for in his years of public office—a consistency in striking contrast to that of his opponent—it is clear that Mr. McGovern will fight for effective and necessary reforms in American social, political and economic institutions.

What this election comes down to is a decision on the direction in which the United States is going to move for the next four years.

Are we going to continue to pursue a foreign policy that, for all its success in certain areas, is essentially based on military supremacy, on a strident nationalism and on a cynical power game that could alienate this country from substantial segments of the international community?

Are we going to continue to pursue a domestic policy that, in its fundamentals, is contemptuous of civil liberties, oblivious of deep social conflicts and racial and economic cleavages in the cities of America, and oriented toward that very "military-industrial complex" against which President Eisenhower perceptively warned us so many years ago?

On virtually every major issue from the war to taxes, from education to environment, from civil liberties to national defense, Mr. McGovern—flattering though many of his statements have been—seems to us to be moving with the right priorities, with faith in the common man, and within the democratic framework. While this newspaper does not necessarily accept his program in every detail as he has thus far outlined it or as the Democratic platform has structured it, we are convinced that the direction of American policy in the next four years would be in safer hands under a McGovern-Shriver administration than under the present regime.

There can be no doubt that Mr. McGovern is now far behind in the Presidential race. But if he succeeds in these next few weeks in getting his basic philosophy of democratic government across to the electorate, a philosophy that rejects the meretricious appeal of his opponents, Senator McGovern may yet touch a chord in the American voter that will respond to his own practical vision of an American society that cares and an American democracy that works.