

Here We Go Again!

By JAMES RESTON

Don't look now, but the 1972 American Presidential election campaign has already started. Suddenly, the candidates are talking and acting in a different way, showing up in newsworthy capitals and TV studios, hiring speechwriters, political strategists and pollsters, attending private dinners with rich benefactors and otherwise demonstrating that they have the itch.

This is not new—only a little early. About this time in the American historical process, halfway between past disasters and future dreams, a small number of Americans, most of them Senators, begin to hear "Hail to the Chief" in the middle of the night, and the long struggle begins.

The evidence is all around us now. Senator Muskie has gone to Israel on his way to Egypt, West Germany and the Soviet Union. Senator George McGovern of South Dakota has resigned as chairman of a commission to reform the Democratic party before announcing his determination to lead the Democrats back to the White House, and is not all.

The Administration's attacks on the wicked television network commentators have stopped: the President has been having a "conversation" with them in the White House library. The Vice President has dropped from the headlines. The official theme out of Washington now is peace, reconciliation and cooperation with the new Congress, even if this means expanding the deficit rather than balancing the budget.

This is all to the good. Both sides have now analyzed the 1970 election returns very carefully and are beginning to deal with the realities of the future: inflation, unemployment, war, the arms race and the young. They

WASHINGTON

are not talking so much now about the old arguments between Republicans and Democrats, black and white, young and old, left and right, Eastern "effetes" and the "silent majority," but looking to the new political alignments of 1972.

There are two major political factors now. The 1972 Presidential election may be quite different. The Supreme Court has given the vote in Presidential elections to 11.5 million new potential voters between 18 and 21. The political analysts and sociologists may be right that the young people want to talk but won't act, and even if they do, that they'll follow the votes of their parents; but even the President and the Vice President, who have children, are not likely to bet everything on this assumption.

After all, Mr. Nixon lost the 1960 election to John Kennedy by 113,000 votes, and won the 1968 election with only 43 per cent of the vote. No wonder then that, since the last election and the Supreme Court's decision on the 18-year-old vote, he has been paying attention to the polls, which say that the young are more Democratic than Republican, and very interested in a better environment, better race relations, and better relations between the White House and the universities.

This 18-year-old vote is the first major change between the last Presidential election and the next. And the second is the formation of an independent people's lobby under John Gardner, former Secretary of Health Education and Welfare, former head of the Carnegie Foundation. It is quietly building a potentially powerful political organization of all the people who

are disenchanted with both political parties, and this "plague-on-both-your-houses" lobby may be the "sleeper" in the next election.

The old political professionals, of course, are cynical about the 18-year-olds and new independent or mugwump organizations like Gardner's, but the President is not, and Attorney General Mitchell certainly is not.

Mr. Mitchell is watching Gardner's "Common Cause" organization very carefully and suspecting that the independent appeal of John Gardner may work to the advantage of Mayor John Lindsay of New York as a factor in the 1972 election. And President Nixon is clearly analyzing the political possibilities of the 18-year-old vote.

"At the present time," he told the TV commentators the other night, "it [the 18-year-old vote] would benefit the Democratic party more than the Republican party. . . ."

"But if we can end the war, if we can end the draft, if we can bring jobs, equal opportunity without the cost of war, without the cost of rising inflation, I believe that young people [will respond] to our very imaginative programs for reforming Government, for the environment . . . that they will be attracted to our party, not as a party, but to our principles beyond party." This is quite different from his campaign themes of 1970.

So both parties are putting their men and their policies in line for the 1972 election. The struggle once more is for the center. The Administration is not talking about a conservative "Southern strategy" now, but talking about itself as a force for reform and change. In such ways, elections have their advantages: they bring both parties back to the realities of peace, and the other practical problems of the people.