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Youth Rally: Cry Is 'Dump Nixon'

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LOS ANGELES, Dec. 9 — Former Representative Allard K. Lowerstein, addressing a conference of 3,000 new voters in Chicago last keewend, said, "Certanly there is no joy in the White House that this thing is occurring."

Mr. Lowenstein is the peripatetic organizer who inspired the "dump Johnson" movement in 1968, and now he is trying to do it again. The Chicago conference, part pep rally and part training session, was the kickoff for what he hopes will be a massive mobilization of young voters in the coming year that will ultimately send President Nixon into retirement.

News Analysis

Given Mr. Lowenstein's past record, and the mood of the young people attending the conference, the former Congressman was correct—the White House could find little consolation in the meeting.

Perhaps Mr. Nixon is worried about the 25 million young people who will be eligible to vote for the first time next year. He made a flying trip to Chicago last Wednesday and told the National 4-H Congress that young people "were moving rapidly into full partnership" with their elders. He could live to regret that partnership.

Mr. Nixon, like Mr. Johnson before him, does not have the trust and confidence of the young people most active in getting their peers to register. Every speaker at Chicago who urged the President's defeat brought the crowd howling to its feet.

Low in Student Poll

The audience, of course, was hardly representative of all young voters, or even of all college students. But just a few days before the Chicago conference, the most recent Campus Opinion Poll, a survey based in Indiana that specializes in determining student attitudes, was released.

That poll indicated that Mr. Nixon was the favorite of only 18.7 per cent of the nation's collegians. The top seven Democratic possibilities polled a combined total of 65.2 per cent. In a head-on contest Senator Edmund S. Muskie, who led the over-all list with 21 per cent, received 61 per cent against Mr. Nixon's 34.9 per cent. Senators George McGovern and Edward M. Kennedy and Mayor Lindsay all defeated the President by from 11 to 13 points in direct confrontation.

In 1968 the cause of President Johnson's downfall was clear—the escalation of the Vietnam war. The sources of Mr. Nixon's problems with youth are more complex. While the President has brought home thousands of troops and moved to end the draft, many young people still remember that 19,000 men have been killed in Vietnam since he took office, and that the bombing tonnage is as great as ever.

Young people are also hurt by the economy, and find it difficult to get part-time jobs to finance their education, or full-time jobs when they graduate.

Moreover, many young people believe the President has waged war on youthful dissenters, the Bill of Rights, and the integrity of the Supreme Court, William H. Rehnquist, Mr. Nixon's latest nominee to the high court, was about as popular in Chicago as George C. Wallace, or John N. Mitchell.

Obstacles Acknowledged

At the same time, the "dump Nixon" movement faces enormous obstacles, a fact that few delegates in Chicago would dispute. Student interest in any cause is a highly mercurial and uncertain thing, and it is far from clear how many young people will really get involved next year.

Registration drives have been highly profitable in some places, but unsuccessful in others, particularly where local registrars refuse to enroll students. After the United States sent troops into Cambodia, young people vowed to work in the 1970 elections to change the face of Congress, but few carried out their promise.

Factionalism, often along racial lines, and fear of effective leadership, often called "elitism," further hamper youthful activists.

More importantly, the commitment of young people next year will turn heavily on whom the Democrats nominate. The youth might be registering heavily Democratic, but they are hardly devoted to the party as an institution. As Mr. Lowenstein put it, there is no "automatic delivery system" funneling these new voters into the Democratic column.

In particular, the delegates indicated that if Senator Henry M. Jackson or Senator Hubert H. Humphrey were named, they would collapse into indifference. The Campus Opinion Poll gave Mr. Humphrey only 2 per cent of the young vote, and Mr. Jackson did not show up at all.

That does not mean that the young people will insist on ideological purity. Time and again they talked about "viable candidates" and "realistic alternatives." They want very much to beat Mr. Nixon, and they do not want to go down in flames with a hopeless cause.

The major victim of this growing mood of realism seems to be Senator McGovern, and the major beneficiary appears to be eSnator Muskie. A sizable number of young activists who helped organize the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns four years ago have joined up with the Maine Senator.

The common words used to describe Mr. Muskie are "acceptable" and palatable." Few youths seem to lump him together with Senators Humphrey and Jackson as anathema; but few get very excited, either.

If anyone is going to come in riding a white horse, and sweep the youngsters along with them, it would probably be Senator Kennedy. Neither Mr. McCarthy nor Mayor Lindsay seem to be making much headway.

The first order of business for the "youth caucus" formed last weekend is to organize on the local level, and seek delegate slots through the lengthy and often complicated procedures adopted by many non-primary states.

The first of these local caucuses meets next month, and by the time of the New Hampshire primary in March, much more will be known about the potential power of the dump Nixon movement.