

Matter of Fact

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The Man Nixon Expects to Face

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DOWN in the dust of the primaries, the announced Democratic contenders struggle onwards towards the next dreary vote. But President Richard M. Nixon has already concluded that his opponent in this year's election is going to be Senator Edward Kennedy, who would not touch a primary with a ten foot pole.

The problem of the Democratic nomination at Miami Beach is not the kind of topic on which the president ever makes pronouncements, except in the hearing of his highest and closest subordinates. But those highest and closest subordinates are talking so freely, all over town, that there can be no doubt they reflect the President.

"Of course, it's going to be Kennedy," one of them recently said, "what else do you expect? The Democratic Party is up to its blank in pygmies; so the party is bound to turn to Kennedy in the end. And if the party turns to him, Kennedy is bound to go."

On the surface at least, the analysis is also persuasive.

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THE PAPIER mache image of an ideal politician, John Lindsay, laying out \$5 a vote in Florida to no apparent purpose; the amiable, every-youthful weathercock, Hubert Humphrey, with his views to suit all audiences and occasions; the good, soggy, plodding Edmund Muskie; the virtuous, boring George McGovern — compared to any Democratic candidate from Alfred E. Smith through Lyndon B. Johnson, they do not look large-sized.

For political purposes, meanwhile, the important thing is that one may be certain President Nixon now expects the "pygmies" to fall by the wayside, and the third Kennedy brother to get the Democratic nomination. That raises three questions:

First, what is the President doing to prepare for a Nixon-Kennedy campaign. Here, the answer is that he has not got a great deal he can do that he was not doing before. He has always expected the left-wing of the Democratic Party to block any nominee who really gives the leftwing ideologists the creeps.

With his stand on busing and in many other ways, President Nixon is therefore seeking to take a permanent hold on the center and the right of center in American politics today.

The second question is simple: Will Senator Kennedy follow the scenario President Nixon has laid out? The answer to this one is far more doubtful. *

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SENATOR Kennedy also keeps telling all and sundry that he can support "either Ed or Hubert." But suppose Muskie drops by the wayside, leaving only Humphrey. Suppose the California delegation, already entered for Muskie, then declares itself a Kennedy delegation at heart.

The countless suppositions raise the third question. If President Nixon is right about Senator Kennedy, what kind of a campaign will it be. The answer to this one is a noisy, nasty campaign. The loudest noise will come, of course, from the millions of Kennedy enthusiasts.

But the Kennedy enthusiasts are a special sect, rather like the Goldwater enthusiasts at the opposite end of the spectrum in 1964. Their cheers will chiefly serve to arouse the sect of Kennedy-haters, which is also large. Noisy and nasty are mild adjectives, in truth. But it is a campaign that the President reportedly looks forward to.

Included in version carried by New Orleans States-Item, 30 Mar 72, filed EMM (a):

* Sen. Kennedy goes on telling everyone, "I haven't changed my views in the least; and I don't expect anything is going to change them."