

A McGovern victory is possible; a break from Nixon would help

WASHINGTON — Two months ago, somebody asked me if I would make a speech during the last week of October on the subject of George McGovern's chances. Mind you, that was two months ago. I did not feel foolish about accepting. But now the date approaches. I can hear my friends talking behind my back: "You know what that fool did? He made a speech entitled 'George McGovern's Chances!'"

I was thinking about it just this morning and wondering whether I should call up and ask for a change of topic: "Will Lightning Strike You?" or "Can You Break the Bank at Monte Carlo?" or "Your Chances With the State Lottery."

And then a small voice reminded me that lightning does strike; that the bank at Monte Carlo has been broken; that somebody does win the state lottery; and that Benjamin Harrison was elected President less than 100 years ago with a minority of the popular vote.

So George McGovern can beat Richard Nixon. How? Well, here's how:

First, McGovern could win in states where he is now running better than he is on the national average. They are the big states. They are California, New York, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Illinois and Texas. That would give him 241 electoral votes. It takes 29 more to win, and McGovern could win in West Virginia, Wisconsin, Rhode Island, the District of Columbia, Connecticut, Arkansas or South Dakota. He can't lose more than two of the big nine even if he takes all of the little eight.

So, it's not likely. But it's not impossi-

ble. McGovern's own polls show him no more than 10 points behind in any of the states except New Jersey. That doesn't mean he has to pick up 10 points. It means he has to pick up 5 points — and one vote. Harry Truman did better than that.

Pollster Louis Harris suggested in a Detroit speech the other day that his figures seemed to show that McGovern would do better if he could win back a public understanding of himself as the antipolitician, the plain citizen bent upon changing the system. Perhaps his recent televised speech on Vietnam was a step in this direction.

Or he could campaign so well that he aroused the spirit of underdogery which carried Truman to victory. He could manage somehow to make the voters angry about the secret funds and secret espionage which have embarrassed the Nixon campaign into such deafening silence.

But it seems to me he will need in addition some big break. What break could he get? Without trying to imagine some disaster in Vietnam or some new and more devastating revelation about Mr. Nixon or his campaign, there is one possibility not so difficult to fancy. He could force Richard Nixon out into the open to fight for his job.

What McGovern needs is Richard Nixon on a cartop in San Jose; Richard Nixon with some modern equivalent of his suggestion that Harry Truman was a traitor or that Dean Acheson was the "dean of the College of Cowardly Communist Containment"; Richard Nixon explaining still another secret fund or that the press kicks him around.