

LOUISIANA POLITICS

McKeithen Deals Himself a New Post-HHH Hand

By BILL LYNCH
(States-Item Bureau)

BATON ROUGE — Was it a combination of fear of his own political future and sour grapes over not getting a vice presidential nominee spot that led to Gov. John J. McKeithen's decision not to support Vice President Hubert Humphrey in the presidential campaign?

Whatever the case, it is almost a certainty that Louisiana's 10 electoral votes will wind up in George Wallace's column in November. Humphrey had a slim chance at best, depending on some active political campaigning by McKeithen, to win the state.

Now the Vice President is left mostly with a coalition of labor and Negro support and it is unlikely to be enough.

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EVEN WHILE HE WAS IN Chicago, Gov. McKeithen had some flickering hopes of being tapped by Humphrey. His reasoning had some merit, based on the belief that without a Southerner Humphrey could write off the South altogether. At the same time, Sen. Russell Long was urging him to "lay in there and pitch."



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So when McKeithen arrived for the national convention he was ready to wheel and deal with the state's 36 delegate votes to the national convention, first as a possible candidate and then on some burning state issues such as tidelands and Michoud jobs.

A top man in Louisiana, the governor soon discovered somewhat abjectly that he was only a topwater among powerful national figures and that Louisiana already probably had been written off by the Humphrey forces.

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SOMEWHAT PIQUED BY THE lack of deference paid him by any of the candidates or powers that be in the

party hierarchy, McKeithen fumed about not being selected to speak before the platform committee and then left the convention early, missing Humphrey's acceptance speech.

He was determined then to win back the solid conservative support he had enjoyed at home before he got vice presidential-itus.

As far as his future relations with the party or dealing with Democratic leaders on legislation such as tidelands, McKeithen probably would have been better off not saying anything. He could have just stayed quiet and let Humphrey slide into the gulf without a shove from him.

But McKeithen chose to make a dramatic announcement that he was exercising his option to support Humphrey "through the convention" and not afterwards.

His announcement received widespread publicity. It made page one in Washington and Fort Worth, Tex., and headlines everywhere. It was featured on national television news.

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FOR FIVE YEARS M'KEITHEN had carefully nurtured an image of being a moderate among Southern governors who had managed to win the support of Negro constituents — projecting himself as a progressive from the South. It was an obvious play, but was accomplished to some degree, although not easily.

In the space of a 30-minute press conference, McKeithen swiftly unraveled that carefully built image, assuming the same stance as that of other Southern governors reflecting the philosophy of a majority of their constituents — making a whipping boy of the Supreme Court.

Perhaps Gov. McKeithen, who has a keen perception of Louisiana political trends, has a like awareness of national trend and sees a Democratic debacle this year. With it he may see a withering away of party control by the old guard and a rise to power of new faces who are willing

to forgive and forget in the future because recalcitrant Southern governors are not new.

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IT MAY THEREFORE TURN out to be McKeithen's wisest political move — restoring his enormous prestige on the home front and beginning anew to build a national political future.

With Humphrey an almost certain loser in Louisiana, McKeithen had little to gain in the state by supporting him. With the South written off by Humphrey, McKeithen further has little to gain even if Humphrey came out a winner in the nation.

One sign of the governor's problems at home is reflected by the attack on Democratic National Committeeman J. Marshall Brown of New Orleans.

There is little chance that Brown can be ousted by the State Democratic Central Committee because under the rules of the national committee only it can remove its members, once appointed. The state committee only has the original power of appointment of a committeeman who serves through the next convention.

Criticism of Brown developed among conservatives irritated over the manner in which the selection of delegates to the convention was handled. It was not so much who was selected, but the constant juggling of names and the secrecy with which it was done.

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THERE IS ANOTHER NOTE which might be explored. When the unit rule was eliminated the Louisiana delegation sometimes split its vote on certain issues.

Howevr, no record was maintained of who voted how and neither Brown nor Gov. McKeithen, who was chairman of the delegation, would provide the information. Frequently when votes came up there would be non-delegates and non-alternates sitting in the chairs allocated to the delegation.

McKeithen has easily survived other personal political crises and probably will survive the current one as well.