

Battle plans, drawn and ready

They keep insisting on being presidential in the White House. They talk about "when the campaign starts" with pious inflections about sweating through the tedious hours of having to run the Republic while George McGovern is out there in the thick of partisan politics.

Nonsense. Not in memory has the presidency, an institution with the clout of several billion dollars and several million people in hand, been so geared into a national campaign so early, so thoroughly and so effectively. It is running full steam now, and the fact is that even in these days before the renomination of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew, their campaign plans may be completely wrapped up before the campaign has even "started."

The next four weeks could be the critical ones. The money men are being committed, the labor unions pledged, the ideological tone set, the images of supporters and followers hardened, the promises of federal largesse and favor made. McGovern still has that "spiritual weapon," the unknown effect of his personal appeal beamed onto all 84 million TV screens night after night. It is a formidable consideration, but the traditional political structures have just about been hammered into place and Richard Nixon has a massive advantage. They may not count for as much as they used to, but the idea they are useless in the New Jerusalem of youth is ridiculous.

In the cool of the Cabinet Room last week 16 big-city mayors, mostly Democrats, heard the President express his deep concern and sympathy for their plight and promise to push harder for revenue-sharing for them. The corridors were hardly cool from a visit a few hours before by

John Connally, the former secretary of the treasury, the big Democrat who is roaming the back rooms of the administration quietly organizing his "Democrats for Nixon" which will be announced soon. If Connally hasn't already been promised secretary of state or some such prestigious post-election position, then the horse-trading abilities of the Texan have suddenly gone flabby—a highly unlikely development. Labor, too, knows there's a campaign on. Consider the Teamsters: last year former President Jimmy Hoffa was paroled from federal prison. Last month present President Frank Fitzsimmons's son was relieved of federal charges that he had misused Teamster funds. And after the union had voted to endorse Nixon, the administration abandoned its effort to get antistrike legislation governing the transportation industry through Congress.

There is Floyd McKissick down in North Carolina suddenly happy and mellow, having been guaranteed \$14 million in backing from the Department of Housing and Urban Development for his "Soul City," a concept for a new, integrated city of 55,000 to rise out of the cotton fields. Civil rights campaigner McKissick has become a Nixon enthusiast, for this season at least.

It was only a few hours after George McGovern was nominated in Miami that some of the wealthy Jewish supporters of losers Humphrey and Muskie—men who already had some misgivings about McGovern's attitude toward Israel—received phone calls with invitations to come hear Henry Kissinger explain the administration's position, and if that wasn't satisfactory, well, then maybe he might take them around to see the President for a few minutes.

Some of the youthful McGovern workers were shocked. The few old professionals in the McGovern high command and some of the recent additions were more amused than anything. That is the way the game is played, and Nixon is doing it better than Lyndon Johnson ever understood it or John Kennedy ever had a chance to do it.

And then over in the top office of the Committee for the Re-Election of the President was Clark MacGregor, a big bear of a Minnesotan who took John Mitchell's place and who may be the smartest appointment Nixon has made in a year. Some of the Republicans worry that MacGregor won't have Nixon's confidence or that MacGregor won't have killer instinct enough. Both concerns seem groundless. MacGregor is a man of tough warmth and decency, and the phone in his office has Nixon on it every day or so.

In San Clemente a while back the campaign strategists sat around painting the big picture. It was MacGregor who raised the question about the tone of the campaign, particularly about Vice-President Spiro Agnew, a concern to many Republicans who feel too much stridency this time would hurt them. "What if we have a Vice-President who talks positively about the issues and about the administration's achievements?" asked Nixon. "How does that strike you?" MacGregor smiled. "That's perfect," he said.

Just a few hours before Nixon announced his intention to keep Agnew, he was on the phone once again to MacGregor and again the fear of Agnew as a divisive force came up. MacGregor wanted Agnew on the ticket, but as an affirmative voice about the state of the world, the expanding economy. "That's just in line with what I'm thinking," said Nixon. At a White House meeting with his staff the President even grew a little angry at repeated requests for the old slam-bang campaign. "Don't they know it is going to be different this time?" he asked. "I'm President." Again MacGregor felt comfortable.

If he is being deceived, then he is less a man than most people judge him to be. The MacGregors were among the last Highlanders to stand with Bonnie Prince Charlie in the battle against the king at Culloden. On some Washington nights, with the sweet smell of political combat in the air, Clark MacGregor dons his red-and-black chieftain's tartan, tailored into a dinner jacket, and goes off on his rounds of hearty persuasion, convinced that, unlike the disaster of Culloden, the MacGregors this time will stand on a victorious field.

Clark MacGregor with predecessor John Mitchell

