



Republicans May Unite the Democrats

— Joseph Kraft

WHEN IT COMES to blowing big leads by up-tight campaigning, Richard Nixon holds the title deeds. So this year he is trying to stay above the battle, making it seem that the fellow in the White House seeking reelection is not old pol Nixon but some ethereal being, preordained for the job, who might more appropriately be called Richard M. President.

Only somehow Mr. Nixon has imparted his tension and self-doubt to the men around him. In the opening exchanges of the campaign, the Republicans have shown as a group the same up-tight campaigning style which used to distinguish Mr. Nixon's solo efforts.

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A NICE case in point is the administration's response to Sargent Shriver's strictures on Vietnam. In opening his campaign as the Democratic vice presidential nominee, Shriver claimed that he quit as Ambassador to France back in January 1970 because he was unhappy with the President's failure to bring the Paris Peace Talks to a successful conclusion. According to Shriver, "Nixon had peace handed to him literally in his lap. He blew it."

Shriver's dubious claim about the motives for his resignation should have been brushed off as the buzz of a pesky gnat. It would have sufficed to surface Shriver's letter of resignation with its warm tone and the statement that there had been ac-

complished the "beginnings of peace." The media could have done the rest, since many journalists who had visited Shriver in Paris had been far more impressed with the fervor of his ambition than the delicacy of his conscience about the war.

Instead the administration unlimbered another big gun — Secretary of State William Rogers. Rogers launched a blanket attack on the Shriver claims as "bunk . . . a fabrication . . . just political fantasy." That indiscriminate retort brought a heavyweight in on Shriver's side. Ambassador W. Averell Harriman had previously refused to work for the McGovern-Shriver ticket. But he all along believed — and repeatedly said — that he had brought the Paris negotiations to the verge of settlement in October and November 1968.

Feeling that his efforts had been disparaged by Rogers, Harriman weighed in with an accounting of his last weeks at the Paris Peace Conference. The upshot was to deepen what had been a trivial affair and build new unity among the Democrats.

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THE BEARING of this on the vote in November is hard to read. But it is clear that the strategy of keeping Mr. Nixon above the battle is not so easy to implement.

Mr. Nixon presses so hard that those around him also develop the qualities that have repeatedly brought the Democrats together against him in the past.