

McGovern Defeat: A Look at Some Factors

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SIoux FALLS, S.D., Nov. 8 —The black limousine that bore the defeated Democratic candidate from his hotel to the airport here today was a back-up Presidential vehicle, flown here in case its occupant should be a President-elect. But the short ride in a President's car was as close as Senator George McGovern was destined to get to the White House.

Many reasons were being advanced and elsewhere today for his defeat yesterday and its proportions. The harshest was that the South Dakotan had never recovered from the Eagleton affair. Another was that the Senator had merely "misread the country's temper." Frank Mankiewicz, the senior strategist, traced doom to June 9, when Senator Edmund S. Muskie decided against endorsing Senator McGovern.

But the injury sustained by the McGovern candidacy was all of those things and more.

Shirley MacLaine, the actress, author and McGovern supporter, swept an arm at one of the Senator's audiences last week and said, "I'm going to write a book about all of this. It isn't going to be about politics, because that isn't what this is."

Senator McGovern's candidacy seemed, in retrospect, to have been more a moral crusade than a political campaign. He began it here 22 months ago with an announcement of candidacy that was laced with moral outrage at the Vietnam war. He ended it here yesterday with a concession statement urging President Nixon to "lead us to a time of peace abroad and justice at home."

In between, Mr. McGovern kept telling his audiences, "I am here because, as President Roosevelt said, the Presidency is pre-eminently a place of moral leadership."

A clergyman in Grand Rapids, Mich., asked Mr. McGovern a few days ago if he would consider naming a theologian as Secretary of the Interior.

"I would consider naming a theologian as Secretary of Defense," the senator replied.

He may not have meant it specifically, but he appeared to have meant it generically. He accused Mr. Nixon of presiding over "the most corrupt Administration in history." The President's October maneuvers to obtain a negotiated settlement of the Vietnam war were "a ploy" and "deceit," Senator McGovern said.

While other Democrats might have concentrated on joblessness and inflation as prima facie evidence of the President's failures, Mr. McGovern made them out to be symbols of a broader malaise—a "corruption" of the spirit—and offered himself as the initiator of "a coalition of conscience."

Robert Shrum, Mr. McGovern's senior speech writer, urged the inclusion of the theme, "Come home, America," in the Senator's acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention. Now, Mr. Shrum said, he questions the political wisdom of such an approach.

"People think they're already home," Mr. Shrum said. "It's tough to believe that General Custer was wrong or, that if the war in Vietnam is bad, the country is to blame. They want out of Vietnam, but they want to bomb Hanoi at the same time."

Before the voters answered it for him yesterday, Mr. McGovern said that the question was whether he was "ahead of the country" in articulating themes of idealism abroad and equality at home.

But now Mr. Shrum and others wonder whether the

Senator was not hampered by the style and circumstances of his nomination and candidacy. He seemed to have become the candidate of the counter-culture, the apologist for amnesty, marijuana or abortion and, in this view, the victim of a political cleavage that was not economic or social but cultural.

"Listening to Mr. Nixon, I get the impression that he thinks I've been President these last four years."—Comment by George McGovern in Tacoma, Wash., on Sept. 25.

Senator McGovern first went on the defensive in the California primary in June. He was the challenger, but he never regained the challenger's offensive stance.

Senator Hubert H. Humphrey of Minnesota, debating Mr. McGovern in California, made an issue of the eventual nominee's plans to cut the Pentagon budget and redistribute income to a radical interpretation. Mr. McGovern was still trying to explain his intentions in traditionalist terms the day before the election.

The Democratic convention in July further corroded Mr. McGovern's image. He was the son of a fundamentalist minister. His speeches kept insisting on rededication to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," ideals as old as the Constitution.

But he never got the opportunity to try to link old values with new movements until 3 A.M. the last night of the convention, when most of the nation was at sleep.

By then, the convention may have burned an image in the consciousness of television viewers as a collection of women seeking to liberalize abortion laws, youths in tee shirts and beards and advocates of a lettuce boycott.

"People think of conventions like they think of first communions," one McGovern aide said, thinking back on Miami Beach. "It's the church of politics."

Into the sacristy, in this interpretation, went McGovern supporters whose own rhetoric made it appear that Mr. McGovern—despite his professed neutrality on abortion reform, his defense of amnesty as a traditional American post-war grant and his denials that he would legalize marijuana use—had, as one aide put it, "let all the kooks into the church."

"We should have had a coat and the tie rule," another rueful campaign worker said.

The next time that most Americans saw Mr. McGovern was in the television films from Custer, S. D., where he stood beside his running mate as Senator Thomas F. Eagleton disclosed a history of treatment for nervous exhaustion.

The initial vow of "1,000 per cent support" soon dwindled to the dismissal of Mr. Eagleton and his replacement by Sargent Shriver, the seventh man to be offered the Vice-Presidential nomination by Mr. McGovern. To the impression of the senator's radicalism was added another—in some views, vacillation, or, less charitably, incredibility.

"Well, yes," Mr. McGovern said last week, indicating that he probably should have handled the Eagleton decision differently. "I probably should have been a little more cautious" before pledging all-out support of Mr. Eagleton.

Other McGovern assistants, under the Senator's writ of silence on the matter for months, now are saying that Mr. Eagleton should have been dismissed immediately for having kept his medical history a secret from Mr. McGovern.

Why did Mr. McGovern lose? "I can think of three names," Frank Mankiewicz replied here

this morning. "Hubert H. Humphrey, Thomas F. Eagleton and Arthur Bremer."

When Gov. George C. Wallace of Alabama was shot by Bremer in Maryland, the McGovern campaign strategists believed that they would be able to combine their movement with Mr. Wallace's to overwhelm President Nixon. They reasoned that Mr. McGovern and Mr. Wallace were both touching the nerve of alienation that ran through much of the American electorate. But it did not work.

"You have nothing to fear but fear yourself,"—Representative Richard Hanna, Democrat of California, misquoting Franklin D. Roosevelt as he introduced Senator McGovern at a breakfast in the Disneyland Hotel.

In the primaries that he swept with stunning upsets, Mr. McGovern captured a share

of the blue-collar vote by going into the grimy mills and factories to shake hands and answer the questions of workers who professed resentment at injustices in the American system.

But in his frenetic campaigning across tens of thousands miles of landscape and in his search for the millions of dollars needed to campaign via television, Mr. McGovern seemed to have neglected the traditionally Democratic blue-collar constituency once he had won the nomination. His sole appearance before an ethnic group was a meeting with three dozen or so officials of the Democratic party's Nationalities Division.

The returns in yesterday's election appeared to bear out Mr. Mankiewicz's contention that the vote had been Mr. Wallace's in his third-party candidacy of 1968, nearly all went to Mr. Nixon.