

BY SHANA ALEXANDER



CHECKERS, CHOPPED LIVER AND ELLSBERG

To most of us Outside Observers, attending the Republican National Convention in Miami Beach was like being imprisoned for a week inside the suffocating tent of a very bad circus. Elephants, clowns, flimflam and balloons abounded, yet the combined effect was to oppress the spirit, churn the stomach and parch the heart. The trouble, I think, was that platform rhetoric, party unity, and after-hours revelry all rang hollow, all felt false. This smug multimedia extravaganza seemed grounded in no American reality beyond the confines of the Miami Beach big top. As the Republican juggernaut rolled slickly forward, the press failed to capture it and the protesters failed to halt it; the two groups of Outsiders appeared equally co-opted, and equally cowed. By the weekend, the only thing in Miami that still looked kosher to me was the chopped liver.

Not surprisingly, Republican Insiders saw things altogether differently. Within the hall, the assembled delegates sat placidly, eyes half-shut, as if some patriotic "Fantasia" in red, white and blue was being rear-projected onto the inner surface of their drooping eyelids. I doubt that these passive party regulars are America—any more than were the younger, hairier, but also passive and mannerly McGovern robots who sat in these seats six weeks ago. We will have to wait until November to find out for sure. Not even the highest penthouse in Miami Beach can provide a clear view into the hearts and minds of middleamerica.

THE BIG QUESTION

The big question in the minds of Insiders and Outsiders alike was: what does the average American go most for? Could it be Mr. Nixon's bathetic evocation, three nights running, of little Tanya, the orphan of Leningrad? Or is it Nelson Rockefeller—atop the slimline new podium styled like a sharp-tailed charlotte russe—telling us that "the President has brought us to the threshold of a generation of peace, even as he plans for a century of peace"? Perhaps, though I sincerely hope not, the master vote getter will turn out to be Sammy Davis Jr. As the chief of the campaign's sentimentality squad, Davis at the youth rally did everything short of licking Mr. Nixon. He is our new Checkers.

But the most bizarre figure in Miami last week was not Davis but Dr. Daniel Ellsberg. Neither Outsider nor Insider, Ellsberg had come there impulsively, at the urging of Pete McCloskey, to try to open up some discussion of the war. But it was hopeless. People who would not even let Congressman McCloskey speak could scarcely pay heed to a born-loser martyr type like Ellsberg. Yet his freakish presence under the big top served another, subtler purpose. A hint of his peculiar role came on his first morning in Miami. When the ex-Pentagon expert threw open the curtains of his Florida hotel room, the flat, humid, shimmery terrain of Miami Beach struck him as an uncanny replica of the Mekong Delta. The numerous waterways, the queer green color of the lagoons, the low, piled-up clouds . . . even the palm trees are the same, and the white plantation villas. "Take away the hotels, and this place could be Can Tho, or any other delta town," he said to his wife.

ISOLATED BIG SHOW

As the dismal week droned on, many people dropped in on the Ellsbergs. Their hotel room became a sort of air vent in the stagnant tent, a window back into reality.

The Republicans' big show was so firmly cordoned off from ordinary life in Miami Beach, let alone from the rest of mankind, that its very isolation served to dramatize the magnitude of Ellsberg's indictment. In the three and a half years of the present Administration, Ellsberg told all comers, 6 million Americans and Vietnamese have been killed, wounded or made homeless. "We have dropped 3,633,000 tons of bombs, or a Hiroshima a week, for every week Nixon has been in office. This is 'Vietnamization'; this is 'winding down the war'."

He went on to say that the Nixon Administration since its inception had systematically deceived the American people. While the President claimed to have a secret peace plan, he had in fact a secret war plan, and it was formulated, with Ellsberg's help, even before Mr. Nixon took office. This "war plan" was known to the Russians, to Hanoi, and to a handful of Americans, including Ellsberg—but not to the American public. "The plan, basically Nixon's and not Kissinger's, was recog-

nizable to all as a scheme to continue and to expand the war *unless*. Unless the Thieu government were maintained indefinitely." And the *unless* was impossible, thought Ellsberg and many of his colleagues, because the Chinese and Russians had already rejected the *unless* for 25 years. "Yet Nixon and Kissinger seemed, madly, to believe in it. So they were not insincere. Rather, they seemed to have a mad confidence in their own abilities as crisis managers." A series of eight escalating moves was laid out, Ellsberg said, and our government began preparations to carry them out. "First, invade Cambodia; second, 'protective reaction' strikes; third, the Son Tay prisoner-camp raid; fourth, the Laos invasion; fifth, the renewal of the bombing; sixth, the mining of Haiphong; seventh, the naval blockade, and eighth, the unrestricted bombing in which we are now engaged." All the cards Nixon thought might be necessary three and a half years ago have now been played, says Ellsberg, and still the war goes on. He does not know what the next card might be.

I don't know how to evaluate these charges, except to feel that they seem closer-hitched to reality than pious double-talk about generations of peace for the children of the world.

PROGRAMED RESPONSES

In the whole list of programed moves, each one separately had the property of seeming insane. Who would have believed, two years ago, that we would really invade Cambodia, for example? "But the fact is," said Ellsberg, "that these gradual escalations have *not* been an incoherent series of ad hoc responses. They were a program of contingent responses, laid out three years in advance."

It was dusk now, and we looked out the hotel window at the string of fat-cat party yachts twinkling on the waterway below.

"Isn't there some way you can get them to listen to this?" I asked.

"Look," he replied, "1984 is *here*. Newspeak is the language. Big Brother has convinced them: war is peace. Right now, you could sail a fleet of sampans past the Fontainebleau, and set them ablaze with napalm, and those people down there would just think it was part of the show."