

McGovern hones 3 major themes, gains confidence in spite of all

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. — The human ear is a fairly accurate applause-o-meter when the crowds are small and this reporter's ears tell him that the following statements are popular with crowds in the late summer of 1972. They are listed in order of their popularity.

1. We must never again spend our lives and treasure to prop up a corrupt military dictatorship.

2. I don't see why the U. S. Steel Corp. should earn \$150 million and pay no taxes while the average wage earner has to pay.

3. I think it's a national disgrace that high officials in the President's re-election campaign paid money to five men who were caught red-handed bugging the Democratic National Committee Headquarters.

These are the three campaign themes that George McGovern used on his recent foray into Ohio, Illinois and Wisconsin. Considering that the time was mid-August, the crowds about equally interested in hearing McGovern and finishing ice-cream cones, the themes went over pretty well.

But McGovern counts on these themes to be evocative rather than definitive. They are intended to make his listeners question whether they any longer trust their government or believe that their country is becoming a better place. McGovern doubts that they do, which is why his oft reiterated, "Come home, America," is thought to strike at what he considers a national malaise. So does his public recollection of a time when "we were all very proud of this country."

In sum, what he is saying is, "If you don't like the posture of your country today and think it can do better, vote for

me." The three themes are intended to put this appeal into specifics.

The McGovern camp purports to be unworried about the possibility that President Nixon and Henry Kissinger can arrange a peace in Vietnam before the election, thus obliterating theme one. It wouldn't change the message about propping up a corrupt dictatorship, they say, and if Nixon sacks Thieu in Vietnam, McGovern will ask why he spent four years and 20,000 American lives before making up his mind to do what he could have done when he took office.

The President might be able to dull the edge of theme two, the tax theme, by putting forward a tax-reform program of his own. But it's an unlikely bet. The Republican answer to calls for tax reform by McGovern, Wallace, Humphrey, Muskie, et al, has so far consisted of complicated explanations of depreciation schedules. They only serve to make McGovern's point — that many large corporations and private citizens have large incomes on which they pay little in taxes.

The third theme also seems a permanent fixture. The Republicans have taken the astonishing position that bugging the Democratic National Committee Headquarters is just politics, and therefore should be put aside until after the election, like so much excessive oratory. The more they stall, the stronger the McGovern theme becomes. It may be No. 1 by Election Day.

As his themes take shape, McGovern is becoming more confident.

He is buoyed by the belief that no matter the disorganization of his party or the paucity of its funds, the American people don't want four more years of Richard Nixon. The belief strengthens his spirit whenever new adversity looms.