

Is This 'The Classic

By Jeremy Campbell

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WASHINGTON — "This fight," smiled Frank Mankiewicz, "reminds me of those British spy stories, Bulldog Drummond vintage, I used to read at school.

"By Chapter Five, at the latest, there always came a moment when an English colonel would turn to one of our fellows and say: "These are desperate men and they will stop at nothing."

"That is exactly how we must think of our Republican opponents in the 1972 election, were billions of dollars and immense power are at stake."

While Senator George McGovern was resting in his summer home on magnificent Chesapeake Bay, his national political director and intimate adviser, Mankiewicz, summoned a strategy meeting in the ramshackle meeting in the ramshackle campaign headquarters in Washington to rally the collapsing morale of the staff and plan the shape and thrust of the McGovern effort in the last four weeks of the election.

I was the only journalist to attend this strange and obviously important meeting. It was held in the shadow of dreadful opinion polls and of

clashing egos among a staff which is said to be constantly maneuvering for favor and power.

Mankiewicz is an organizing dynamo, an ideas man whose schemes and stratagems are the meat of the McGovern campaign. He was Bobby Kennedy's press secretary. He is the son of Herman Mankiewicz, once known as "the Voltaire of Central Park West," who moved to Hollywood in the '20s to write films and gave the world such masterpieces as "Citizen Kane" and "Duck Soup."

The elder Mankiewicz was a gambler, drinker and acerbic wit who hated Hollywood and its protocols and once, to show his disrespect, wrote a Rin Tin Tin script in which the dog carried a baby into a burning house.

Frank is a wit as well, but he is also a cold-blooded, pragmatic and Machiavellian operator. He likes to say that Machiavelli ran "a couple of successful campaigns" and hopes 300 years from now it will be said of someone that he is too Mankiewiczian.

The younger McGovern workers are jealous of him and are always bringing up the fact that it was Man-

kiewicz who checked Senator Thomas Eagleton's closet for skeletons.

Mankiewicz stood against a wall in the shabby fifth-floor office at McGovern headquarters, a bottle of aspirin and two cheese sandwiches on the desk in front of him. His face was pouched and quilted as if it had just gone 10 rounds with the likes of Joe Frazier, and barely survived.

The staff people were not in an easy frame of mind. About 50 of them stood, perched on desks or squatted on the floor. They shot hard and exasperated questions.

"Where the hell are those show business celebrities who worked for us in the summer?" snapped a middle-aged man in a fawn suit. "Are they running away from us or what?" A girl al-typewriter, spoke of a general feeling that McGovern is "not Presidential, does not seem to be in command of his ship." A young man on the floor growled: "The students are all sticking their noses in books or watching re-runs of the "I Love Lucy" show. It's incredible what's happening."

By contrast, Mankiewicz is almost debonair. He has a plan, he tells them which will win the election for

American Fraud'?



FRANK MANKIEWICZ
He has a plan

McGovern instead of, as the world expects, going down to the most humiliating defeat in the history of American politics.

"Over the last four or five days," he said, "we have been on the telephone to our local party chairmen, asking what they think is the hottest hidden by a huge IBM test issue to hit Nixon with in the last leg of the campaign. The result surprised us. Almost unanimously they chose the scandal over the American sale of wheat to Russia."

Dead silence greets the news. The wheat scandal, the belief that the Nixon ad-

ministration gave advance warning to the big grain exporters, enabling them to sell at fancy prices, while keeping the small farmer in the dark, is well known, but not widely assumed to be the magic formula which will send McGovern to the White House.

"This is the classic American fraud," Mankiewicz goes on. "It's like those Hollywood movies about the city slicker who comes into town and gets Henry Fonda to sell his land cheap. It's easy to understand because it's the old story of the guy who was buying not telling the guy who was selling and that is the best-known swindle of all time."

Obviously, Mankiewicz has immense faith in his plan, and so it will be waved like a banner in the McGovern campaign from now until November.

The Mankiewicz theory of victory goes like this. Nixon is leading in the opinion polls by some horrible margin like 30 percent, but the private samplings of the McGovern polling team led by the Harvard boy genius, Pat Cordell, show that a good third of the Nixon support is so shallow that it can

be ripped off in a matter of days.

"Cast your minds back to the New Hampshire primary," Mankiewicz exhorts. "Remember when Edmund Muskie was in front of us by 57 percentage points. Then we took our own polls and found that the big, sleeping issue in the campaign was the fact that the voters were to disclose the secret lists of their big contributors.

really angry about the way most candidates refused to disclose the secret lists of "McGovern was the only candidate to publish the names of his contributors, and we took that issue and ran with it. The result was that Muskie was elbowed out of the race. We can do the same with the wheat scandal in this last stretch of the 1972 elections."

Mankiewicz thinks the final result will be very, very close. "In a couple of states we'll be Schneidered," he says. But he is encouraged by the large percentage of undecided voters. "They must be for us," he crows. "Who the hell can be undecided about Richard Nixon?"

I doubt, however, that Mr. Nixon is shivering in his shoes. The election of 1972 is

strange and growing stranger, because of the deadness of public response to normal political stimulus.

The juices of anger simply are not running in the body politic this year. Student radicalism is on sabbatical. About 25 million new voters, trumpeted for so long as the secret weapon in McGovern's armory, are causing him severe distress. Young factory workers are signing up almost gleefully to vote for Nixon.

Survey upon survey shows that voters have made up their minds that Nixon is more capable than McGovern to occupy the White House. And having opted for Nixon, they suspend belief altogether in the possibility that politicians can bring about meaningful social change. They do not want to hear about the ills and shortcomings of America any more.

Going down in a treacherous lift from that meeting on the fifth floor of McGovern headquarters, a young volunteer spoke her feelings in a single, outrageous pun.

"That wheat trick Mankiewicz is trying to pull," she said. "Don't you think he's clutching at straws?"