

Yaffers and Yaffettes: Only

A Commentary

By Nicholas von Hoffman

Young Americans for Freedom chose Washington to have their Seventh Biennial Convention this week, and when this city was selected, the organization's leaders must have had a very different kind of meeting in mind. One imagines that they foresaw a huge and hugely enthusiastic convocation of young conservatives, at large and rampant, lapping it up in the still newly victorious second Nixon administration.

If they thought they would be coming waahooing in here like thirsty cowboys ready to stand the town to drinks and pay for them with last November's golden sacks of electoral votes, they've found out their money is no good. Before Watergate, Washington might have been impressed or frightened, but to this city of thieves, calculators and survivors, they smelled like losers. The media, which might have come over to their hotel to do those predictable wave-of-the-future stories, was only modestly represented.

But the Yaffers and Yaffettes (the older gender distinctions are still strong among them) also came in diminished numbers, or so it seemed to those of us who'd been to other conventions, although the official registration figures were large and healthy. President Truthful, always too "pragmatic" and too accommodating to the left ever to be a favorite here, was in too

much trouble, but even more serious was what was hanging over Vice President Eggplant. In recent years he had been their hero, so now they were left with Reagan and many misgivings. "They don't have anybody on horseback to follow," said their president, Ronald Docksai.

Not that anybody was outwardly conceding anything. Nixon shouldn't give up the tapes, Agnew didn't do it, whatever it is they said he did, but this year we're concentrating more on issues, antiabortionism, stop amnesty, oppose the use of student fees to help Ralph Nader in his work of undermining America. The kids, and they're nice kids, the kind who'll make good dependable employees, were without oomph and suffering from a rightwing wipe-out like that which overtook and destroyed their left competitors over the past few years. Those books on the menace of communism are more confusing than informing when your own administration enjoys better relations with Moscow and Peking than with Paris and Tokyo.

As at all YAF conventions, Bill Buckley came and was adored. This princely founding spirit of YAF is nearly incomprehensible to them, but it makes no difference. In fact, it enhances the regard of these lower-middle and modestly-middle, middle-class kids, for the Connecticut millionaire with the fine bridged nose and the high chin. They stand in the corridors exclaiming over the size of his vocabulary.

Leftovers for Heroes

Poster

For all Buckley's hauteur and principled indifference to pain and suffering, the man has a reputation for great kindness and generosity. No one who knows him personally speaks ill of him and it is these qualities that bind the organization to him.

It can't be leadership or policy direction. He displayed little of either and when he spoke at his press conference, the ornate phrases, sinuously complex, struck the ear like sounds from a radio with defective transistors and uncertain diodes.

"Churchill . . . a member of the House of Commons . . . he'd given sodomy a bad name . . . Washington Post editorials . . . lachrymose expressions by Lowell Weicker . . . the debilitation of Agnew re-enforces the strength of Nixon . . . I missed the first predicate . . . on a graph of zero to 100, zero representing Senator Williams and Senator Kennedy 100, where would Melvin Laird come in? 45? . . . Anyhow Melvin Laird was not hired to read the Wealth of Nations to Mr. Nixon." It was grand and it was baffling, but no more so than interviewing Miss Sherry Shealy, the Miss Peach Tree Queen who spoke to the convention in her guise as a 23-year-old state representative from South Carolina.

With Buckley saying he disagreed with both Nixon's foreign and domestic policies, although he still supported him, the most interesting people at the conference were the Libertarians, the far, far, far righties who are so much around the other side of the political

sphere that they're backing into the far, far, far lefty anarchists.

Libertarians come in many hues ranging from Ayn Rand moral muscle worshippers to those who regard Thomas Jefferson as a dangerous proponent of centralized power, but all Libertarians of every flavor were purged from YAF four years ago. Still, they come around sometimes as delegates and sometimes in the form of the young draft resister in patched lavender jeans and bare feet. On the lam from the FBI, he says he's been making his living for two years, "writing in Libertarian magazines and selling books and drugs."

At least one of the Libertarians, Woody Jenkins, is not only a Democrat but a member of the Louisiana state legislature from Baton Rouge. He and a few other of his confreres hold out no serious hope for the Republicans, or YAF for that matter. They sense a greater affinity with the new, anti-big government, Democratic liberal than with the party of Nixon and ITT. As for YAF, they seem to come around to debate and to try and hook converts by whispering, "Pssst! Hey, kid! You wanna little taste of *real* freedom? Try some of this."

It is lost on the average Yaffer and Yaffette who, in this low period, is content to blow an occasional uncertain party favor and wear a defiant lapel button reading, "NOBODY DROWNED AT WATERGATE."

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