

McGovern: Ready to Try Again

George McGovern has thought about it for a long while. He has gone through the stages of humiliation and remorse. He has also gone through the stage of analysis; that is to say, the stage of thinking about his mistakes and of what might have been. Finally, and most importantly, he has gone through the stage of vindication.

Privately, thereafter, and without telling any except a very few of his associates from the last campaign, he has made up his mind. George McGovern has decided to try again.

So closely held is McGovern's decision that neither Gary Hart, his 1972 campaign manager, nor Frank Makiewicz, his former political aide, has been informed. But some of those who raised the money the last time around are privy to the secret and have been pondering it with awe.

As well they might. There is no precedent. Alf Landon didn't do it; Barry Goldwater didn't do it; Herbert Hoo-

ver didn't do it. Alton B. Parker didn't. In recent history, only Alfred E. Smith suffered as McGovern suffered and retained the pride or ambition—perhaps in this instance it was jealously—to try again, and Smith was a hopeless candidate at the Democratic convention of 1932.

But all these men were politicians. McGovern, as his former aide, Richard Dougherty, has pointed out in the most readable of the 1972 campaign books, is not. "Goodby Mr. Christian" is the title of Dougherty's book and it pictures a man more moral than practical, more religious than political, a missionary but not an organizer; a John the Baptist but not a Moses.

A man who saw himself, however modestly, as a voice crying in the wilderness during 1972 must find total vindication in the events of 1973. How else except as vindication can Mc-

Govern see the public's recognition that Richard Nixon does indeed represent—as McGovern had maintained—"a total erosion of political and moral and public values?"

Wherever George McGovern goes these days, vindication meets the ear and, in whatever George McGovern reads, vindication meets the eye. Citizens stop him on the street to tell him he was right. Professional pollsters inform him that if the public had known last November what it knows now, he would have won. Each day's headlines remind him that what he knew through intuition has now been demonstrated in fact.

So perhaps it is unfair to compare McGovern with other defeated candidates. None of them was ever proved so immediately, so demonstrably and so sensationally to have been right in his criticisms of the man who beat him.

By the same logic, it may be unfair also to tab McGovern's decision as colossal error. "I know a climber when I see one," Dougherty wrote of his former boss, "and I know how smart a smart Rube can be, how tough, how cunning, how indomitable."

McGovern did not look very smart or very cunning in the last campaign but he did look tough and indomitable. Moreover, as the title of his former press aide's book suggests, the senator from South Dakota is a true believer in that law which prizes those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Mr. Christians don't quit.

But the punishment McGovern faces is awful to contemplate. There will be betrayals by former aides whom McGovern now considers to be disciples. Friends in the Senate who have uttered kind words of consolation will now turn upon him like so many wolves upon a wounded pack leader; the pros will bestir themselves to remind each other that the party has only one sure loser. Those who have been saying "Too bad, Senator" will be frightened into honesty: "You don't mean it. Not again."

They will be wrong.