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Watergate and Party Policies

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Elephant in the Denver Post

Democrats

By Curtis Gans

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IT MIGHT BE heretical to suggest that in certain fundamental ways the Democratic Party might have been better off if Watergate had never happened.

The party surely appears to be prospering as a result of the scandal. For the first time in recent memory the Democrats are solvent. Democrats won handily in five of six special elections to fill vacancies in the House of Representatives, all in previously Republican territory. The party looks forward with some realism to a landslide victory in the November elections. Even the divisions that rent the party asunder in 1968 and 1972 seem to have receded into the mist of recent history.

Yet, it is possible to see the current Democratic prosperity as illusory—to see in Watergate the means to temporary gain and the excuse for lack of planning and forethought.

For the pickings from Watergate were too easy. Democrats won their special election victories not because of their particular gifts of grace but because Republicans stayed away from the polls in record numbers rather than give assent to Richard Nixon's conduct of the affairs of state. If Mr. Nixon remains in the White House, they may continue to remain home and give the Democrats their expected fall landslide. But they are not likely to continue to eschew the polls when the Democrats no longer have Richard Nixon to kick around.

One morning, not long from now, the Democrats are likely to wake up to Gerald Ford in the White House and the cold reality of their situation—that their leading economic thinkers, grounded in the theories of John Maynard Keynes, seem no more able to describe or cope with the present dismal economic picture than do the Republican economists grounded in more classical economic theorists; that the entire residue of Democratic foreign policy planners from four administrations beginning with Roosevelt seems palpably less capable of formulating a coherent foreign policy to deal with the world of the 1970s than does Henry Kissinger acting alone; that Democratic legislators lack the ability to enact the few creative items on their agenda—campaign finance reform, land use regulation, national health care—and that the party has failed to develop one political figure whom the public views consistently as favorably as it does the unlikely and accidental President-to-be Ford.

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Without a coherent set of policies and a core of leadership — without a center that can weld its membership into an effective political force, appeal to the general electorate for support and give promise of effective governance of the American nation—the victories provided by Watergate may fade as quickly as the public's interest in the scandal.

Concepts of a Center

THE CONCEPT of a center in American politics has fallen into disrepute thanks, in part, to the not quite so gentle ministrations of Richard Scammon and Ben Wattenberg. They produced a doctrine of political centrism which holds that the key to political success — a candidate's ability to win — is directly related to the degree to which a candidate mirrors the views of the center of the electorate to which he is appealing.

There is, however, an older conception of a political center that is more honorable and creative. This concept holds that every institution has a center — a core of ideas and a group of people — which gives the institution its purpose and vitality. For a political party it is the consensus program it takes to the people and the leaders who plan and articulate that program.

For nearly 30 years, the Democratic Party had such a center. In the political response to two major crises — the depression and World War II, its aftermath and the British retreat from global responsibility — came the central core of Democratic policy: Keynesian economics, federal assumption of the burden of certain social services and international economic and military interventionism on behalf of "friendly nations" and against the spread of Communist (Soviet) power.

These policies, with minor modifications to meet the issues and crises of the times, and the leadership which emerged from four Democratic administrations, were the binding nucleus of what has been called the New Deal Coalition. The Democrats knew what they were for and, through the use of executive power to implement most of their policies, the bully pulpit of the White House to educate the general public to them and the constant reinforcement of three generations of Democratic candidates for federal office, they made ideas considered radical when first presented part of the national consensus. And at the same time the Democrats were able to control both houses of Congress for all but four and the White House for all but eight of the 26 years between 1932 and 1968.

In the 1960s, the Democratic center came apart. A combination of changed world, domestic and political realities, the success and subsequent revealed inadequacies of

Democratic policies and changed political perceptions all conspired to undermine Democratic cohesion. Indeed, the turbulence of the 1960s might well be viewed as an attack on Democratic consensus, by citizens who, in the main, had experienced neither the privations of the depression nor the rigor and threat involved in World War II.

Political Movements

THE ATTACK took the form of political movements—civil rights (against a Democratic economic bargain with the South that permitted continuing legal inequality); anti-war (against an anti-communism that held out the candle of freedom but unleashed death and destruction, with an accompanying domestic loss in the cohesion, will and economic wherewithal to pursue social reconstruction), and environment (against the fundamental Keynesian tenets of economic stability and social progress through stimulated growth).

The new forces knew what they were against; they could not articulate what they were for. The older politicians knew what they were for, and clung tenaciously to it. They came from different worlds and clashed to a standstill in the common arena of the Democratic Party. It is little wonder that blood flowed in the streets of Chicago and that George McGovern lost by a landslide in 1972. There was nothing to reconcile or bind the old and the new together.

Nor is there anything now. With the end of the war in Vietnam, with a common en-

emy in Richard Nixon and by dint of the subtle political efforts of Democratic Chairman Robert Strauss, differences have been papered over and the cacaphony of battle has been temporarily muted. But the differences still remain. No center has been created to fuse the old and the new and the landmine of division and dissension remains ready again to explode and rip the party apart.

Two Maxims

THERE ARE TWO traditional political maxims which help explain why, despite the obvious need, the Democratic leadership has been loath to chart new policies, project new leadership and create a new center.

The first holds that political parties win not because of the programs they advance but because of the mistakes of their opposition. The second holds that candidates win elections and policies are determined by the seat of the pants and in response to need and crisis once in office. Neither may be valid in the Democratic Party's present circumstances.

A recent survey commissioned by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees showed: that the average voter is considerably more sophisticated than predecessors; that despite Watergate, the average voter is no more sanguine about the Democratic Party's ability to govern the country than he is about the Republicans, and that he wants solid programmatic answers to problems ranging from the econ-

omy to ecology before he will decide for whom to vote.

In short, the average voter is growing increasingly independent, less likely to follow party label and more likely to examine the what before voting for the who. It is a compelling reason for the Democrats to begin to address the question of policy and program.

Perhaps equally compelling is the fact that the nation bears the scars of seat-of-the-pants thinking and crisis response. The plight of the American city is stark testimony to the short-sighted follies of misguided benevolence. A despoiled, sometimes dangerous, environment tells of the inadequacies of economic policies aimed at stimulated and unrestricted growth.

The state of disarray afflicting the global economy is in part because the United States, in the hope of fighting communism by fostering nation building, chose to export its own policies of enlightened industrial development to nations which could not support such development. All this was done by Democratic administrations. The Democratic policies were not wrong; they just failed to envision the long-term consequences and hidden byproducts latent in their execution.

Social need requires the Democrats to re-examine their agenda and develop policies that take into account the long-range future as well as short-range necessity. Political need requires them to develop the policies before, not during or after, the next election. For George McGovern lost, in some measure, because he advanced hastily

Democrats and Watergate



Fischetti in the Chicago Daily News

"Frankly I don't care one way or the other about voter apathy."

thought out new ideas and had to retreat from them. The party, and for that matter the nation, needs well thought out ideas and the appropriate rhetoric and spokesmen to carry them to the nation for acceptance. This can only be developed through time, and the only time the Democrats have is the present, when they are out of office and without agenda.

Four Challenges

THERE WAS A MOMENT, a brief instant, when the Democrats might have addressed out of fear the questions of policy they have subsequently refused to address out of their own volition.

When Richard Nixon, fresh from his landslide re-election triumph, delivered his Second Inaugural Address, he challenged some basic Democratic assumptions saying that rigid ideological anti-communism—which formed the basis for much of U.S. postwar foreign policy—might not be the way to conduct international relations, that centralized national bureaucracy might not be the most effective means of political administration, that massive categorical domestic programs to meet newly publicized social ills might not be the most rational means of planning social policy and that there were limits to what government could or should do to insure a fulfilling life for all Americans.

He was addressing themes that were felt by a substantial number of Americans, themes he proposed to take to the electorate in 1974 and with these issues as a backdrop, win. In that brief moment, the Democrats were running scared, were looking toward their drawing boards for new ideas and approaches to answer his questions and might seriously have begun to address central questions of public policy they had answered by rote for too long.

But within three months, Judge John Sirica pressured James McCord into revising his testimony, revisions that implicated the White House in the Watergate break-in and cover-up. The Democrats breathed a sigh of relief, went on with business as usual and the moment passed.

The Democrats have precious little time left between now and 1976. Unless they actively work to develop a new set of policies and a group of spokesmen to articulate them, they may again fall victim to the centripetal forces that defeated them in 1968 and 1972. They will again be subject to the divisive racial demagoguery of a George Wallace. They will again be potentially prey to the polarizing effects of primary politics. They will again be searching for a charismatic leader to bridge their substantive gaps. And they may again be the victims of the vagaries of an assassin's bullet.

Despite Watergate, or perhaps because of it, the Democrats may lose, and deserve to lose, in 1976.

Republicans

By Douglas Hallett

The author, a student at Harvard Law School, was formerly a Nixon White House aide.

CONTRARY TO popular belief, great political scandals do not necessarily spell catastrophe for the political party involved. In fact, in the two great American scandals before Watergate, just the opposite happened: Both scandals involved Republican administrations—those of Presidents Grant and Harding—and both times the Republicans won the White House again in the next election. In each case Americans evidently concluded, quite properly, that the misdeeds had been the sins of individual men, not of party or ideology, and continued to vote their unchanged convictions.

There is no reason why this cannot be the case again in the wake of Watergate, despite GOP defeats in five of the last six congressional by-elections. But it probably can happen only if Republicans begin looking to leaders who are as committed to what Mr. Nixon's government promised to be as they are contemptuous of what it became.

In the heat of the impeachment proceedings, what the Nixon administration promised to be may seem distant to many. But it was only 19 months ago that the President was speculating—and many were agreeing—that his massive reelection victory represented a major turning point in American politics: the denouement for so-called Eastern establishment liberalism and the beginning of a "new Republican majority." It was only last year that such books as David Halberstam's "The Best and the Brightest" and Peter Schrag's "The Death of the WASP" were predicting the end of Ivy League-Wall Street-Martha's Vineyard control of the corridors of power.

Today, of course, the President who forged his mandate by becoming the first Republican in more than 40 years to win majority support among union members, Catholics and Italian-Americans cannot attract 25 per cent support among any of them. Heir-apparent Spiro Agnew, a "new majority" symbol from the lower middle class of Baltimore, has been disgraced, replaced by a bland Midwestern party regular of the type that helped keep the GOP a minority party from the time Franklin Roosevelt was first elected. And the news today again is dominated by such Eastern establishment figures as Archibald Cox and ex-Kennedy aide John Doar.

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Nobody better symbolizes this resurgence of the class President Nixon derides as the "Georgetown cocktail set" than his Boston Brahmin former Cabinet member, Elliot Richardson. Hardly more than a year ago, Richardson was widely viewed as having sold out his principles to President Nixon. As Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, he tolerated busing and welfare policies with which he could not possibly agree. As Under Secretary of State and Secretary of Defense, he backed a war he surely abhorred. Yet now Richardson is widely regarded as a shining example of integrity and honor, a man who handled the Agnew and Watergate affairs with distinction and who resigned as Attorney General in a rare act of high purpose and courage.

There is no denying the appeal of a Richardson in a season where men like John Mitchell, H. R. Haldeman and Jeb Magruder seem to crowd our political horizon. At the least, it is hard to imagine a man who insisted on having an hour each day to read poetry while clerking for Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter contemplating "enemies" lists, forging State Department documents, or bugging political foes. It is indisputable that a Richardson would bring to the White House a sense of moderation and rectitude which has been notably absent during Mr. Nixon's years.

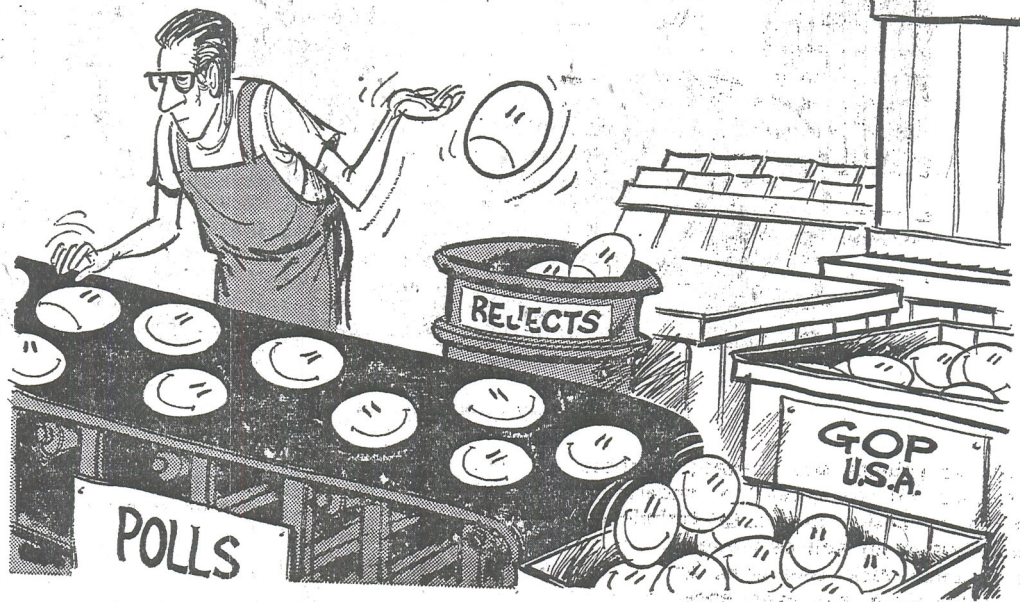
But it is questionable whether these patriotic traits on which Richardson and those who ape him—Illinois Sen. Charles Percy, Illinois Gov. Daniel Walker, California Secretary of State Edmund G. Brown Jr., Massachusetts Gov. Francis Sargent—base their appeal is all or even most of what will be demanded of the next President. Was the political transformation that seemed to be taking place in the country before James McCord wrote his letter to Judge Sirica nothing more than an illusion based on phony press releases? Was it a charade wrought by the wiretap and burglary schemes of a corp of ruthless political adventurers? Or was there something more to it, something which both can and should survive the demise of Mr. Nixon and his thuggish henchmen?

The evidence suggests that there was in-

deed something more involved and that, despite Watergate, it will not just fade away.

First, none of the demographic changes which Michael Bernstein first noted in his 1961 "forgotten American" speech for Barry Goldwater and which Kevin Phillips later codified in "The Emerging Republican Majority" have been altered. The populations of Boston, Philadelphia and Detroit continue to decline; those of Albuquerque, Santa Ana and Fort Worth continue to grow. Roosevelt's "one-third of a nation ill-housed, ill-fed, and ill-clothed" has moved west and become middle class; their political prejudices run more to preserving the value of their paycheck so as to make the payments on their second car than to "reforming" the nation's industrial organizations.

Second, the almost abject failure of the Nixon administration to confront in more than rhetorical terms the issues which concern this emergent class ensures that those same issues will be on the political front-burner two years hence. Inflation is running at 10 per cent a year. Massive court-ordered busing has been slowed only in the most extreme cases. More forced housing desegregation awaits the passage of the current mort-



Fischetti in the Chicago Daily News

gage money crisis. Mr. Nixon has done little or nothing to deliver on his promises for tax reform, aid to parochial schools, pension protection, and affordable national health care. All of these issues will loom at least as large in 1976's presidential politics as the more elusive issue of integrity in government.

Third, and perhaps most important, the same patrician sensibilities which now seem so compelling in men like Govs. Walker and Sargent may guarantee their incapacity to contend with the bitter, often vulgar, political unrest that has been brewing in the electorate since George Wallace first surprised Lyndon Johnson in the 1964 Indiana and Maryland presidential primaries. Messrs. Percy, Walker, Brown and Sargent are men of compromise and consensus, but the times may call for decisive leadership above all else. President Nixon recognized this with enormous success in his first-term Soviet, China and economic policies.

Contrast Richardson's style with the President's. Like Mr. Nixon, Richardson has shown himself to be ready to take great risks in furthering his political career. In 1962, he unsuccessfully challenged now-Sen.

Edward Brooke in what most saw as a doomed-from-the-start attempt to become Massachusetts attorney general. Four years later, he succeeded in tagging his opponent in the lieutenant governor's race with corrupt practices; the charges were proven false, but only after Richardson had won the election.

On the other hand, unlike the President, Richardson has shown little inclination to take risks in substantive policy-making. He allowed John Ehrlichman to block his access to the Oval Office for six full weeks while President Nixon scuttled the welfare reform program Richardson was guiding through Congress as HEW secretary. In the same post, he vehemently defended before the Congress anti-busing policies he had opposed at the White House. Even as attorney general, in handling the Agnew and Watergate scandals, he let others take the initiative, refusing to press Mr. Nixon to force Vice President Agnew's resignation and lamely moving to defend Special Prosecutor Cox only in the last week before his dismissal.

This is not to suggest that a presidency under a man like Richardson, or under a

Percy, Walker, Brown or Sargent, would not have its advantages. Any of them would offer a welcome relief from the brass rhetoric and brazen misbehavior of the Nixon administration. All would attract to high office men of greater accomplishment than the former soap salesmen and military staff officers who now occupy the upper reaches of the White House. Certainly each would soothe the aesthetic sensitivities of the nation's better-educated English professors, political scientists, and journalists.

But it is still worth wondering whether the price to be paid for these rewards might be too high. In 1965, the New York City electorate, in a mood of purposeful reformism not unlike that now pervading much of the national electorate, turned out the Democratic city "machine" and installed John Lindsay as mayor. After eight years of his rule, the voters could hardly wait to replace him with the very same representative of the "tired" leadership Lindsay had defeated, Abraham Beame. Contrary to what Joseph Kraft and others say, the political movement Mr. Nixon represented until Watergate is

constituted by more than "traditional morality reinforced by police power." It is moved, instead, by legitimate grievances felt by a majority constituency which has been consistently left out in the political machinations of figures like Mr. Lindsay.

This "new majority" is not likely to allow itself to be ignored again in the wake of Watergate, as the recent congressional by-elections may suggest. The California gubernatorial primary points to a primary reason why Republicans have lost five out of six of these votes: Only 47 per cent of the eligible electorate, the lowest percentage since 1942, turned out to vote. Apparently neither the Watergate-tarred Lt. Gov. Ed Reinecke nor the somewhat Richardsonian state controller, Houston Flournoy, struck the voters' fancy.

The GOP must look to leaders who recognize these facts, leaders favoring policies far different from the blanket pro-Nixonisms and anti-Nixonisms many Republicans now preach in embarrassment over the escapist boosterism that Vice President Ford and others have been offering. If they don't, they will have to pay the price: continuing to lose.