

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1967

The Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) had its long-awaited dinner at the Rackham Bldg. recently, only a few days after anti-war demonstrators had clashed with the warmakers and local gendarmes in the same locals.

I tend to think that the spontaneous outbreaks which resulted in 14 arrests probably had more effect (if anyone can have effect) in dramatizing opposition to the War in Vietnam than the ADA gathering of 500 \$10.00 dinner-goers passively listening to ADA National Chairman John Kenneth Galbraith—in a setting which was essentially a reunion of the Democratic Party.

One of the big ADA projects is “Negotiation Now” petitions. But negotiations in themselves are not even a worthwhile temporary goal if the U.S. government still insists that it has the right to deny a substantial portion of the Vietnamese people to determine their own revolutionary destiny (with a little bit of outside help, admittedly, from China and the Soviet Union).

It will be interesting to observe the future development of ADA in Detroit. The successful dinner was the culmination of a hard year’s efforts by a new “young breed” of Detroit liberals who took over the corpse of the old group which had formed the basis of the tremendous transformation of Michigan politics from 1948 on from an arch-conservative Republican tradition to a relatively more progressive and labor-oriented Democratic mold.

An earlier attempt to revive the moribund group took place in 1966 when Larry Greene was appointed temporary organizer. But poor Larry, not even an arch-liberal, decided that the first project of the ADA should be to endorse the obviously competent and qualified civil rights attorney George Crockett, Jr. for Recorder’s Court.

Boy, did the shit begin to fly then! You must remember that ADA was originally formed in 1947 by Hubert Humphrey specifically as a liberal “anti-communist” organization. It was closely tied to Walter Reuther who, at that time, had just succeeded in taking over the United Auto Workers from a left-wing dominated element.

Crockett in 1946 had been the director of the Fair Employment Practices Division of the U.A.W. and in that year had severely criticized Reuther (who was then head of the UAW’s General Motors Division) for not negotiating a “fair employment practices” provision in the new G.M. contract. When Reuther took over the U.A.W., Crockett was naturally one of the first to go.

The bitterness of the U.A.W., which has up ‘til recently dominated ADA, was still present in 1966 when Greene tried to push through an A.D.A. endorsement of Crockett. The old ADA leaders knew that if the Crockett issue ever came to a vote, the rank-and-file ADA members would overwhelmingly support him since they didn’t give a fuck for the old animosities of the ‘40s.

So what did they do? They dissolved the organization illegally, falsely alleging that there was no longer much interest in the maintenance of a Detroit chapter.

After the turmoil of the 1966 election was over (and Crockett got elected anyways and has already become one of the outstanding jurists in the history of Detroit), Jordan Rossen became acting chairman of a new organizing committee. Rossen is a former chairman of the Michigan Young Democrats and brought a lot of his friends from that group in with him.

Rossen works for the U.A.W., but since he is independently skilled as an attorney, he does not have the economic dependence on the UAW that an international representative out of the shops would have.

Other than throwing its recent dinner, the new Detroit ADA did some pretty good things on a small scale. It endorsed Rep. Jackie Vaughn III's "district plan" for electing councilmen, something the old UAW-dominated group of "white liberals" would never have dreamed of.

Rossen and Dennis James, representing ADA, personally visited Police Commissioner Girardin to complain about the "bonus arrest" techniques that were used in the January 24 "narco bust." (Girardin promised it wouldn't happen anymore.)

What about the future of ADA—it's hard to say. It could conceivably be the only integrated relevant organization in this town. It could zoom into new areas of action and prove a useful force in correcting the bushels of inequities revealed by last summer's rebellion. It could turn a few old ADA heads, maybe not have such a successful dinner next year but accomplish some noteworthy things.

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