

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1968

Much attention in the community from now on will be focused on the primary election to be held Tuesday, August 6. Perhaps the largest effort will be that of the McCarthy for President Committee, together with the Michigan Conference for Concerned Democrats, to get their 2,000 candidates for precinct delegates in the Democratic party elected throughout the state. A substantial success in this campaign could effect some changes in the internal structure of the Democratic party, since there are only a total of 5,000 precincts in Michigan.

The McCarthy-MCCD forces hope to elect majorities or substantial minorities in many of the state's 19 congressional districts (there are about 250 precincts in each district)—and therefore put pressure on the national convention delegates going to Chicago later in August to support McCarthy for the Democratic nomination, to insure fair representation of Black Democrats from the Deep South, and to get a progressive, anti-war platform adopted.

This massive project is also designed to help “liberalize” the character of the state-wide Democratic organization and to make it more relevant to the needs of the poor, the Blacks, and restless young voters.

At the very end of August, after the national convention, the state Democrats will convene in Grand Rapids to nominate a candidate for the Supreme Court, candidates for the state Board of Education, and the governing boards of the three major state universities—WSU, MSU, and U of M. A revitalized party organization might take advantage of this opportunity to dump some of the Democratic reactionary deadwood on some of the college governing boards (especially Michigan State) and to run some dynamic, liberal candidates who have some comprehension of the new needs and demands of Michigan's increasingly militant students.

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In the local U.S. Congressional districts, there are no significant contests. Able young Rep. John Conyers, Jr. is unopposed, so he'll have time to work on some other important projects, one of which is the setting up of a national coalition of Black Democratic political leaders which will seek a specific Black voice in the choosing of the Democratic Presidential candidate.

Rep. Martha Griffiths is unopposed in the Democratic primary also. She seems to have moved a little leftward and dove-like since 1966 when she had to face the powerful intellectual, if not electoral, challenge of Jim Lafferty. Though she beat Lafferty handily at the polls by a six to one margin, she's been politically clever enough to scent the rumblings of discontent which the Lafferty candidacy seriously represented in 1966.

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One hot spot this summer will be the Detroit Common Council race where 49 candidates are vying for two vacancies.

Three men, traditionally identified with the old-line Negro political establishment, are running. They are Robert Tindal, executive secretary of the Detroit NAACP, who became somewhat of a hero recently when the cops

walked out on him during a Common Council hearing; James Garrett, executive director of the Detroit Council of Organizations—the so-called “moderate” anti-Cleage group; and Rev. James Chambers, who was elected in 1966 to the Wayne County Community College Board of Trustees (Which never functioned due to the failure of Millage).

A leading Black female candidate is attorney and teacher Jessie P. Slaton—whose broad appeal got her nominated for Common Pleas Judge in 1966, though she failed to get elected.

The most militant Black candidate is Ed Vaughn, the owner of the famous bookstore on Dexter Blvd.

Among the white candidates, former Recorder’s Judge David I. Kaufman should do well with his politically potent name. He should also be especially popular with progressives for his refusal to buckle under to lynch-mob pressure in the famous J.L. Hudson slaying.

Marvin Surowitz, who launched Underground Cinema in Detroit, plans on running a real people’s campaign, insisting on fair police treatment for not only Blacks but for poor, student, and hippie whites.

Rev. David Eberhard, frequently associated with liberal causes, will probably be a serious candidate—but there are rumors that he’s a little too close to Mayor Cavanagh. This isn’t necessarily bad in itself, for Cavanagh is not the most reactionary of mayors, but there is a great need nowadays for independent liberal forces on the Council who will really push the mayor hard in the crucial areas where he’s been so wishy-washy—police recruitment of Blacks and allegations of police brutality.

A most interesting race to watch will be for the Democratic nomination for Wayne County Sheriff. Roman Gribbs is the very-recently appointed incumbent and he’s trying very hard to erase his negative image. He appointed a Black former FBI agent as undersheriff and they are now both frequently seen on TV deploring the squalid, inhuman conditions at the Wayne County jail.

Ex-police inspector and Councilman, Philip Van Antwerp is also shooting for that spot. He tried to placate the liberals by supporting open housing, but then got all screwed up in his defense of the Stoner rifle and support of a “stop-and-frisk” ordinance. And, of course, the recently-deposed former sheriff Peter Buback is seeking vindication by the people.

With the white vote about to be so badly split, several Black leaders induced Louis Simmons, Jr., former president of the Wolverine Bar Association, to run—and he might be able to make it if he gets enough publicity about his identity in the Black community. Perhaps, he might follow the recent lead of the Suffolk County (Boston area), Massachusetts sheriff Who ordered all his deputies to turn in their guns.

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