

Off Center

Sol Plafkin

1968

One of the most noticeable things about the primary election this month was the unusually low turnout especially for a Presidential year. The excitement of a forthcoming national election contest generally creates among the electorate a greater interest in the traditional process and usually stimulates people to exercise their franchise more enthusiastically.

The low turnout could be attributed to various factors: August 6 was a very muggy day for one thing; perhaps, a more important element was an increasing feeling that the present political system is somehow irrelevant to the solution of pressing social problems.

A good example of this irrelevance has been the virtual abandonment of the running of the City of Detroit and the Detroit Board of Education by public officials to private, non-accountable individuals and businesses. The New Detroit Committee, composed essentially of corporate, suburban-oriented interests—with vast economic powers—has been doing most of the decision-making for the City of Detroit. The main task of the Common Council during the past year has been actually to maintain the status quo due to the very limited funds available for new projects.

In non-economic areas, the Councilmen appear to be most concerned about being re-elected next year and are just responding to those portions of the electorate which they must rely on most heavily for their electoral support. So, in the recent vote on “stop-and-frisk,” Councilmen Hood and Ravitz responded to the desires of their liberal white and black constituencies by voting against it—and the other five councilmen, perceiving a still viable white reactionary majority in 1969, voted for it.

Fortunately, some of these white politicians, especially so-called “liberal” Council President Ed Carey (who introduced “stop-and-frisk” together with ex-cop Phil Van Antwerp) may be in for a shock by underestimating the new sophistication of the Black voters and a happy new awareness of many Detroit white liberals of the extreme necessity for supporting Black candidates who appear to have broad support in the Black community.

The election results reveal that the leading Black candidates did very, very well. Besides having almost completely unified support in their community, these “leading” Black candidates were also supported by poll slates from a “bi-racial”, predominantly white “Urban Alliance” set up under the inspiration and guidance of Larry Horowitz, administrative aide to Rep. John Conyers, Jr.

A possible strategy of the new coalition of Black and White liberals might be to concede one seat to Wierzbicki or Wise, and to concentrate all their forces on behalf of Tindal. The coalition was also very effective in the other non-partisan races. Both their Black candidates for Detroit Board of Education, Andrew Perdue and Jessie Dillard, and former Inkster Black Municipal Judge Robert Evans was nominated for the very important vacancy on Recorder’s Court.

The coalition’s only failure was in the race for sheriff. Recently-appointed Sheriff Roman Gribbs had the advantage of an incumbent label under his name plus a lot of free publicity after he dramatically replaced Peter Buback. So that the attempt to replace Gribbs in the Democratic primary with Black attorney Louis Simmons, Jr. didn’t

have much of a chance. Still, the sheriff race brought about greater unity in the Black community itself as the other, more militant Black candidate Norman Burton made a last-minute plea to his supporters to support Simmons.

In the Common Council race, with four to be nominated for two vacancies, it was no surprise to see Anthony Wierzbicki, whose Detroit American has had a monopoly of the local press, 'come out a strong first. Robert Tindal, executive secretary of the Detroit NAACP, came in second. Mrs. Blanche Parent Wise, whose last year on the Common Council in 1961 was marked by extreme bigotry, came in third. Rev. David Eberhard, liberal pastor of the Riverside Lutheran Church in a poor integrated area on the lower east side, squeezed out the other "leading" Black candidate Mrs. Jesse Slaton, for fourth place.

On the national scene, the nomination of the Nixon-Agnew ticket by the GOP isn't as frightening to me as it may be to others. The Democrats figure that Nixon will stimulate so much "gut" reaction from liberals and progressives that they can get away with nominating Humphrey for President and even a conservative like Texas Governor John Connally for Veep.

But Nixon has several good things going for him: he is not personally involved in continuing the disastrous course of the U.S. in Vietnam, he is sensitive to the growing peace movement in the nation, and he appears sincerely interested in seeking an accommodation with the Soviet Union. (This may not be so hot for long-term revolutionary goals, but it at least lessens the chance of a nuclear confrontation for a while).

Gov. Agnew of Maryland was elected in a Republican upset two years ago with a strong liberal Democratic cross-over in response to a reactionary Democratic candidate.

Domestically, while the GOP may utter some silly slogans about "law and order", they won't be able to ignore the growing turbulence in our cities and will have to come up with some positive, constructive solutions—with less of the meaningless liberal rhetoric than the Democrats spew. Keynoter Gov. Daniel Evans of Washington gave a beautiful speech of genuine concern for the future of our nation that Humphrey, or even Sen. McCarthy would find it difficult to surpass.

So, all-in-all, the election of Nixon—as the inevitable alternative to Humphrey wouldn't be such a catastrophe; and those of us who are going to bother to vote in November will probably be able to safely "do our thing" by supporting someone like Eldridge Cleaver on the New Politics-Peace and Freedom ticket.

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