
EDITORIAL

Recently the Democratic Party's Commission on Presidential Nominations completed its recommendations. In themselves the changes didn't amount to much, but they offer further evidence of the deepening abyss between the needs of the society and the conditioned responses of politicians. At a time when the electorate has lost its faith in the intelligence, let alone the probity and concern for the common good, of its elected representatives, the Commission has struck two blows on behalf of greater participation—by professional politicians, that is, and 549 of them to be precise. That is the number of elected and party officials who will attend the presidential nominating convention as uncommitted delegates. Another proposed rule would reinstate “loophole primaries” and allow a candidate with a clear plurality to claim all of the delegates in a district. This, like yet another rule that would shorten the interval between the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries, is intended to favor “well known” candidates over “outsiders.” The peroration to the report was furnished by the chairman of the Commission, Governor Hunt of North Carolina, who has been a professional politician since high school. In words that read like a parody of the closing lines of the *Communist Manifesto* he commended the rules as “more representative of the mainstream of our party, especially the working people of our party”—meaning, of course, party pros and bureaucrats.

Meanwhile the Republicans were busy doing what they do best, deciding how to buy elections with the enormous sums of money at their disposal. According to a party spokesperson, the party is about to “break history” by increasing its strength in both houses during an off-year election. “History has never seen a time,” he glowed, “when there has been a combined party resource of \$60 million to \$70 million to elect just a handful of people to the House and Senate.”

Perhaps “disbelief” is the best word to describe the growing mood of the country as it comes to realize that in addition to being mean-spirited toward the poor and powerless, totally subservient to business interests, and hostile to civil liberties, the behavior of the Reagan administration appears increasingly bizarre. It is not just that more people are beginning to realize the depths of the President's ignorance and prejudice, or the utter banality of his mind, but that there is

a degree of heedlessness about the administration that is unnerving. Whatever the issue—disarmament talks, Soviet relations, antitrust policy, worker safety, the tax status of racially discriminatory schools, social security benefits, Central America, environmental protection, or the “new” federalism—there is such a consistent insensitivity to consequences and an indifference to the reasons, many of them sensible, behind the reforms of the past half-century, that a deeply ideological view of the world must be presumed at work.

Recklessness and zeal do not have much to recommend them any time, but they have even less at a time when our major decision-making institutions have it within their authority to decide on one of the following courses of action: to extinguish all or most of mankind; to sanction irreversible damage to the natural and social environment; and to inflict genetic damage on future generations. Only slightly less appalling, but just as symptomatic of the irrationality pervading the society, are the drastic effects which governmental decisions are having on the lives and prospects of those who either have had only the briefest enjoyment of social advantages—such as the skilled workers—or none at all. In parts of the country half of the black youths between eighteen and twenty-two are unemployed. We have been taught to mesmerize ourselves by closely watching slight variations in stock quotations, price indexes, GNP, and money supply, while we remain ignorant of the historical costs that we shall pay as a society for reduced education, continuous unemployment, squalid living-conditions, and spreading hopelessness.

It is time for a real change, for a basic politics, a politics of survival. So-called advanced societies have abruptly reached a point where they feel forced to deny, reduce, or threaten the essentials of human existence to a rising proportion of its people. More people are facing the loss of jobs, health care, food, housing, and education. And all people are more threatened than ever by nuclear destruction as our strategic thinking has progressed from the dangers of a nuclear mistake, to the possibility of a nuclear accident, to the likelihood of employing nuclear weapons on a tactical basis.

A beginning has been made. Grassroots politics exists. In parts of the country and the world it is flourishing. The movement for nuclear disarmament is a growing force in Western Europe: the time is ripe for such a movement in this country. There are innumerable signs that within the last year Americans have become increasingly apprehensive about the dangers of nuclear weapons and the madness of trillion-dollar defense appropriations. Weaponry, war, and defense policies have traditionally been surrounded by more taboos against popular participation than has any other area of government. Not the least value of the anti-nuclear movement is that it challenges that taboo and opens nuclear war to dem-

ocratic discussion. The fundamental task is to expose the ramifications of nuclear weapons without losing sight of the urgency of the problem. Nuclear weapons and defense budgets are not accidental priorities. They are the expressions of a structure of power—political, social, and economic—that is disposed toward expansion, inequality, and hierarchy. They cannot be contested as though only one issue is involved. Survival can no more be settled by a treaty than environmental protection can be assured by an Environmental Protection Act. The Reagan administration has shown how easy it is to reverse decades of environmental concern and protective legislation. Only radical change that attacks the structure and culture supporting nuclear war measures up to the magnitude of the current crisis. The practical task is to ally movement politics, the natural scale of antinuclear action, with grassroots politics, the natural school of democratic experience.

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January 25, 1982