

Dispirited Democrats Are Seeking a Unifying Force in State

BY MARTIN TOLCHIN

Dispirited and disunited, the state Democratic party has begun its fall campaign fearful that it will lose not only 43 badly needed electoral votes for the Humphrey-Muskie ticket, but also a Senate race and control of the State Assembly.

"The Democratic party is in chaos," said City Council President Frank D. O'Connor, reflecting the consensus that emerged from interviews with dozens of party leaders. "There's no direction, no leadership, no agreement on party principles or programs."

Mr. O'Connor, whose leadership has been criticized by some supporters of Vice President Humphrey, is among a number of party leaders quitting politics to take judicial posts. Their departure led a top organization leader to comment:

"The exodus to the bench is a public testimonial to the disorganization of the Democratic party. These men don't know who's in charge, or where the party is heading, so they wanted security."

Kennedy Leaves Vacuum

The assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy is widely reported by Democratic leaders to have destroyed a major cohesive force in the state party, which respected Mr. Kennedy's popular appeal and feared his power. Since his death, they say, many ideological differences within the party have become irreconcilable, and the old coalition to which he appealed—labor, liberals and minority groups—has collapsed.

Many Democrats say that the party has splintered into three groups: the old-line county leaders, who are squabbling among themselves and have amassed a long record of statewide defeats; the unreconstructed McCarthyites who proclaim "the politics of chaos" and say they have more to gain from a Humphrey defeat than from his victory; and the shadowy Kennedy forces, nominally supporting Humphrey, but also waiting in the wings to pick up the pieces if he loses.

Amid this disarray, some efforts at restoring cohesion are visible, including enlistment of old allies in the Liberal party. Deputy Mayor Timothy W. Costello, while proclaiming himself still "an ardent supporter" of Senator Eugene J. McCarthy of Minnesota, has agreed to serve as vice chairman of the New York State Citizens Committee for Humphrey and Muskie.

"Since political decision requires the making of hard choices," he observed, "I can clearly make the choice for Humphrey and Muskie." Dr. Costello is a former chairman of the Liberal party, which has endorsed Mr. Humphrey for President.

Mr. Humphrey has named a former Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Eugene P. Foley, who is little known here, as

his campaign coordinator in the state.

But the party remains divided—so divided that Mr. Humphrey's name is notably absent from the bumper stickers, posters and campaign literature of many Democratic "peace candidates."

In Westchester, Democratic campaign posters read: "O'Dwyer for Senate; Davidoff for Congress." In Nassau County, campaign workers answer headquarters telephones saying, "O'Dwyer and Lowenstein Headquarters." In Manhattan's 17th Congressional District, bumper stickers read: "O'Dwyer and Koch." Paul Davidoff, Allard Lowenstein and Edward I. Koch are the Congressional candidates paired with Paul O'Dwyer on the bumper stickers.

By way of retribution, some upstate leaders have threatened privately to sabotage the O'Dwyer candidacy by not getting out the vote. One upstate leader said of the O'Dwyer supporters who refused to endorse the national ticket:

"They want to accept the benefits of the disciplined organization, while remaining undisciplined."

Burns Loses Power

State Chairman John M. Burns is the man nominally responsible for maintaining party discipline and unity. But Mr. Burns, a political protege of Senator Kennedy, says that the Senator's death has diminished his power.

"It's much more difficult for me since the death of Senator Kennedy," Mr. Burns conceded. "I was closely associated with him, and he was a powerful figure whose death created a serious void."

"I don't have any way of punishing people who don't go along with us. There's very little patronage, either Federal or state."

As a Kennedy man, Mr. Burns received little patronage from President Johnson, while most state patronage was channeled through the Assembly Speaker and the county leaders.

The Vice President also has failed to achieve party unity in New York, despite the powers at his disposal, and the immense potential powers of the office he seeks. Mr. Humphrey has met with a number of the McCarthyite leaders in an effort at personal diplomacy, but with little apparent effect.

Mr. Lowenstein, the young lawyer who helped persuade Senator McCarthy to make the Presidential race, said of his meeting with the Vice President:

"He's personally very affable, but in terms of issues, he hasn't made any overtures. He's like a drowning man clinging to a diving submarine."

Mr. Humphrey's advisers are even concerned about the hostility of the children of traditionally Democratic voters.

"We find that their own chil-



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Frank D. O'Connor, President of the City Council.

dren are influencing voters over 45," said George Backer, a key Humphrey aide in the state. "The parents have to find something to justify their vote for Humphrey, and it's this justification that we're now working out."

The Vice President's most enthusiastic supporters privately give him only a 50-50 chance to carry the state. Unimagined five months ago, some Democrats even fear losing the Bronx—one of the firmest bastions of the party.

Wallace Causes Concern

Nor are the Humphrey forces complacent about the candidacy of George C. Wallace, former Governor of Alabama. State Democratic leaders say Mr. Wallace's candidacy will cost Mr. Nixon more votes than it will cost Mr. Humphrey. But some Democrats say that they fear that Mr. Wallace's candidacy reflects a national trend toward the right, in the same way they interpreted the Henry Wallace candidacy of 1948 as reflecting a national trend to the left, away from Thomas E. Dewey and toward Harry S. Truman.

Specifically, Democratic precinct captains in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods such as Forest Hills, Queens, and the Midwood section of Brooklyn, report that Jewish voters express deep concern over the issue of law and order. Their fears are underscored by the fact that many Jewish communities, such as Flatbush and the Grand Concourse, are in the direct path of expanding slum areas.

"The Democratic party can't at one and the same time, appeal to the people in the ghetto and the middle-class parents in Queens," said a Queens district leader.

There is no longer a Senator Kennedy, with broad appeal to both groups. Indeed, there is some question whether the

Kennedy forces remain a power in the state.

William vanden Heuvel, a former Kennedy aide, asserts that, "The Kennedy group will remain intact because it's held together by a common bond of identity with issues and attitudes." In fact, Stephen Smith, the Senator's brother-in-law, has told associates that he is considering a race for either Governor or Senator.

But other politicians say that the Kennedy forces coalesced around the Senator's personality and his promise of power. Herman Badillo, the Bronx Borough President, reflects this attitude when he asserts:

"There isn't much left of the Kennedy forces without a Kennedy."

Joseph Crangle, the powerful Erie County leader, says:

"The county leaders were afraid of Kennedy when he was alive. Now they've consolidated their power."

City Leaders in Comeback

Indeed, the big city leaders have again emerged as the unquestioned power in the state party, but many question whether they can retain their power.

In typical Democratic tradition, the county leaders are racked by a feud. This one is between Stanley Steingut, the Brooklyn leader, and Moses M. Weinstein, the Queens leader. Both men aspire to the Assembly Speakership, a post held by Mr. Steingut's father, and now temporarily in the custody of Mr. Weinstein.

More important, the county leaders are considered vulnerable because of their long record of defeats. The party has won only two major statewide contests since 1954, the first in 1955 when W. Averell Harriman was elected Governor and then in 1965, when Senator Kennedy was elected.

"When we ran a Kennedy we won," said a Democratic state senator. "When we ran an O'Connor, a Beame, a Morgenthau or a Donovan we lost. The Democratic party hasn't won an election because it tried to be more conservative than the Republicans."

Finally, the new primary law conspires against the county leaders. No longer can they swap favors in exchange for places on the ticket.

The new law eliminated conventions for nominations for statewide contests. Previously, the candidate chosen by a state convention could not be challenged in a primary contest. In place of the conventions, the state committee now designates a candidate, who may be challenged in a primary contest by any candidate with 20,000 signatures on nominating petitions, and by anyone who had 25 per cent of the state committee vote.

Mr. O'Dwyer, who won an upset victory in the primary election for nomination to the Senate, summed it up this way:

"The primaries gave life to the party. It always was a party without any democracy, but things are changing rapidly. The old days are gone, and there is a new force coming into it that will not shut up."

Mr. O'Dwyer, who has become the focal point of the former supporters of Senator McCarthy, is among those party figures who believe that the dissensions in the party are growing pains accompanying a rapid redistribution of political power. The leaders with this view predict that this redistribution will incorporate the disaffected groups—the students, youths, McCarthyites, Kennedy supporters, Negroes and Puerto Ricans, and provide a broader base for the party. The leaders say that this will ultimately strengthen the party, and give it victories.

Percy E. Sutton, Manhattan Borough President, a former Kennedy man and a McCarthy supporter, who up to now refuses to endorse Vice President Humphrey, says:

"The party is in such disarray that if it is to survive we'll have to have a new coalition. The old alliances of labor, minority groups and liberals have not been clicking well, and unless we change, we're not going to win."

This concept is supported by John F. English, another former Kennedy associate, the Nassau County leader and newly elected national committeeman.

"Our party has to be broader based," says Mr. English. "We've got to understand that a lot of new people want to come into this party. We've got to open up the doors to them, and do it right away."

When Vice President Humphrey named Mr. Foley as his campaign coordinator here, Mr. Foley was reliably reported to have told Mr. Humphrey that Mr. O'Connor's United Democrats for Humphrey, the original Humphrey organization here, would have to be replaced to assure broad support. Mr. O'Connor obtained a copy of the critical memorandum and threatened to boycott the national convention.

Patronage Flow Considered

Mr. Foley says that he will not remain Mr. Humphrey's liaison in New York after election day, when Federal patronage will be channeled through Mr. English in the event of a Humphrey victory. As for party unity, Mr. Foley expects no trouble from the former Kennedy supporters, who may be grooming yet another Kennedy for 1972.

"The people for Teddy have got to be for Hubert, or they don't have a party," says Mr. Backer. "Rockefeller proved it. The organization men live on politics. What have they got besides regularity? Without regularity, there is no party. Without a party, there are no future victories."

The big city leaders, the state chairman and the party regulars are trying to persuade Mr. Humphrey to make some gesture to attract the McCarthy and Negro votes. They hope that he will disassociate himself more from President Johnson's Vietnam policy, and not campaign too heavily on the issue of "law and order."

The Democrats point out that it's still a long way until election day. In the final analysis, they are reduced to pinning their hopes for unity on a force outside their party. They concede that the Republican candidate is handling himself with professional skill, but Theodore Sorensen put it most succinctly when he said:

"Richard Nixon is a great healer of Democratic divisions."