

HUBERT HUMPHREY TALKS ABOUT THE FUTURE OF HIS PARTY

An Interview      October 2, 1972

Q.    Senator Humphrey, as a veteran of many Democratic campaigns, what do you see ahead for the party?

A.    First of all, the reforms of 1972 brought vast numbers of new people into the Democratic Party. The quota system has been looked upon by many of us as unfortunate and going further than good judgment would require.

I'll summarize by saying that in the next Convention of 1976, there will be no need for quotas. There will be women present, and young people, in large numbers without any quota system. And there will be Chicanos and blacks and Indians. So I believe the so-called reforms, which have caused us trouble, will end up by giving us new strength in years to come.

Now, let's look ahead. What do we need to do? I hope the Democrats have learned a lesson. So you can expect that after this election, whatever the results, there will be a much more determined effort to give some better balance to the overall constituency of the Democratic Party.

A.    What do you mean by "better balance"?

Q.    To put it bluntly, Mr. and Mrs. Middle America -- the ethnic groups, or whatever you wish to call them -- will be actively solicited by those of us who believe that this party needs a better balance.

And we're going to have to ask our friends in the labor movement to take a more active part at the precinct-caucus level instead of just spending time on voter registration and the COPE (Committee on Political Education) program. Otherwise, a limited number of political activists take over and have a predominant influence.

It's a whole lot easier to go to a college campus, talk to a thousand young people, and get them to participate in a precinct caucus or convention politics than it is to go out to a factory and talk to people on the assembly line.

But the Democratic Party cannot win without having the working families of this country in support of its ticket. And these working families will not support a party that seems to be an extremist party, one way or another.

If the Democratic Party gets into the position of representing only the college campus, the militant youth movement, racial minorities, then it will face the same problems the Republicans face -- namely, it will look like it is a special-interest party.

The only way I know that you can win elections is to recognize that the majority of the American people are not poor, that there is what we call middle America, and that it is made up mostly of working people. And that great middle section represents victory or defeat for a political party.

The Democratic Party for years has had the image of being the party that relates to the real problems of the people -- jobs, income, employment, inflation. Now, if we get the image of being a party that has gone to extremes -- getting ourselves identified with what I call the esoteric issues -- if your image is one of extremism as the people see it, then we can't win.

Q.    Don't the so-called reform Democrats seem to be in charge now?

A.    It's my judgment that a number of people who today think of themselves as reformers and insurgents will become regulars by the time they're through a major campaign. I've watched a lot of them start to ripen and mature rather rapidly out home and other places.

Now, there will be a hard core that will be even more radical and extremist. As they lose control, as they lose power, they'll become more far out, more militant. But a number of these new-politics types who are now in charge of a precinct or a ward or a county committee will become regulars and the backbone of the party.

So it's my judgment that the party will not be in control of people who prefer to dominate a party rather than win elections. I don't think you can just have the old regulars, because there aren't enough of them. What we need is a blend, a kind of active coalition.

Whatever the results of this election, I think the Democratic Party will not settle down so much as it will move forward.

Q. Are the Democrats writing off the South?

A. No. There's a two-party system in the South. You also have splinters within the Democratic Party. Great changes are taking place in the South. The South has been industrialized since World War II. The whole pattern of race relations has changed significantly. What you have today is a factionalized Democratic Party, with a growing Republican Party. I don't think the Democrats can ever take the South for granted again. I think we ought to go down there and battle it out. That means we're going to have to have respect for Southern Democratic leadership.

Politics in this country is a close-fought battle, and the Democratic Party would be making a very serious mistake if it turned its back on the South. You know, they're the same kind of people we have up North. The South today has trade-unions, great universities, organized farmers. The South today has the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) just like the North. As a matter of fact, race relations in some areas of the South are better than they are in the North. And the blacks are registering. We would ignore the South at our peril, and I am not going to let that happen.

Q. What about union workers and ethnic voters in the North?

A. I know we're in trouble with the labor vote, the blue-collar worker, the Catholic vote. But it is my judgment that a large number of those people who today say they're for Nixon will come back to the Democratic Party by election time. There is this danger: that once they've defected, it is easier to stay away from the party.

I think the whole question of the Democratic Party's future is how people view its leadership. If they think its leadership is catering to a small group, we're going to lose elections -- and we should. If its leadership seems to have a broad view of the nation, and really appeals to the heart of the country, the working people, we will win elections.

The one thing that the American people are more interested in than anything else is not the details, but can you trust the man? They ask this question of the political party: Does it represent my interests? The minute a political party loses its identity with its constituency, even though you still have the label, you're in trouble.

There is hardly anyone in our party who is not worried at the moment. They are worried about whether we will be able to hold the House and Senate, and control of state legislatures. But the election is in November. I believe we can.



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