

# What Is To Be Done?

## An Agenda for the Second Administration

Jeffrey Bell:

### Nixon and Realignment

(WASHINGTON) — In the wake of the November 7 election returns, by far the oddest in American history, political observers here were left with a feeling of numbness. There was little jubilation among Republicans — aside from the narrowly focused group associated with the Committee to Re-Elect the President. There was little despondency among Democrats — excepting the narrowly based group behind the Democratic nominee. For most, the presidential aspect of the election had been over for months. For many, it ended last June, in the final week of the California Democratic Primary, when none other than Hubert Humphrey mounted the most effective anti-Left attack of recent American politics, reversing overnight the upward trend of George McGovern's campaign and starting an irreversible decline in the fortunes of the "Prairie Populist." For other observers, the election ended in Miami, at the "open" convention that turned out to be closed, when McGovern became the first candidate ever to have suffered at the polls as a result of the convention that nominated him. When the Eagleton affair followed closely on the heels of the Miami disaster, few were left who thought the presidential election had not ended. And in any sense that mattered, it had.

All that was left, then, was to see how far the Nixon tide carried. Most professionals, Democratic and Republican, agreed that if Nixon received over 60 percent of the vote, his party would have at least a decent chance of winning both the Senate and the House. This aim would be helped by a light turnout, in which the probable stay-at-homes would be anti-McGovern Democrats likely to vote Democratic for lesser offices.

The turnout was light — only 55 percent, the lowest since 1948. Nixon won the popular vote, 61 to 38 percent, a margin within a single point of those predicted by Gallup and Harris, and the biggest Republican popular victory since 1920. Nixon won 49 of the 50 states, the best any Republican has ever done, and carried the Electoral College 521 to 17, also an easy Republican record.

But in the races for the House and Senate, and even for lower offices such as state legislator, it was as though the presidential election had never occurred. The Nixon tide was not a tide at all, but a kind of political laser that obliterated one target and no others. The new Senate, 57-43 Democratic instead of 55-45, will be about three votes more liberal

than the one Nixon found so refractory in 1971-72. The new House, 244-191 instead of 256-179, will be a shade more conservative, but Nixon won all his first-term House votes anyway. Republicans lost a net of one governorship and suffered a slight erosion in control of state legislative bodies. The two-seat Senate loss was the first GOP Senate erosion since — 1964.

Adding to the impression of nothing having happened, of things having returned to Square One, is the fact that the Congress is a virtual carbon copy of the one that faced Nixon in January, 1969, following his 43 percent first-term victory. That House was 243-192, one seat more Republican than now, and that Senate was 57-43, exactly the same as now.

What, then, of realignment? Well, a realignment did occur in one region — the South. McGovern did not get more than 33 percent in a single Southern state. It was the first time in history that the Republicans had won more than half the Southern states — and they won them all. In presidential races for the foreseeable future, and barring a comeback by third-party conservative populism, the South is once again "solid" in presidential elections — for the Republican party.

The pattern for lesser offices is of course less dramatic, but there is a trend and it is clear. The Republicans have 7 of the 22 Southern Senate seats (10 of 26 if Oklahoma and Kentucky are included), 2 more than before. They have 34 of 108 House seats, 7 more than before and easily an all-time record. The figure after the 1960 election was 7 House seats and no senators. The GOP gained one governorship in North Carolina, for a total of 3 out of 11, and nearly added the governorship of Texas for the first time. The first Southern GOP governor in this century was elected in 1966. Republicans increased their numbers in every state legislative body that had an election; the party has a long way to go, but it has history on its side. This becomes particularly evident when the three Upper South states — Tennessee, Virginia, and North Carolina — are examined. If realignment is in process throughout the South, in these northernmost Southern states it has already occurred. Republicans now govern all three states. They have four of the six senators, and the other two are conservative Democrats, one of whom was elected as an independent. With a 1972 gain of 2, Republi-

cans now have 16 of the region's 29 House seats, with solid majorities in Virginia (7-3) and Tennessee (5-3). Only the Democratic-controlled state legislatures and courthouses have managed to withstand the realigning tide.

Incumbents, particularly in the House and Senate, remain as difficult to defeat in the South as elsewhere, but there is no further question that the GOP Southern Strategy, culminating in the Nixon Administration with the symbolic appointments of Haynsworth and Carswell and the opposition to busing, has worked. In the future, Democratic presidential nominees will have to win by taking 270 of the 388 electoral votes beyond the South, Kentucky, and Oklahoma. It can be done, but it won't be easy.

The other major element of the 1972 returns that has a whiff of realignment about it is Nixon's showing among Roman Catholics. According to post-election estimates, Richard Nixon became the first Republican since well before the New Deal to win a majority of Catholic voters. In his first term, Nixon helped this process along significantly with his social conservatism, his opposition to abortion and busing, and his firm if belated support for tax credits for parents of private-school children. But at least equally responsible for his remarkable showing were the views of his opponent and the life-style of his opponent's supporters. The trend of Catholics toward a more conservative stance in the socio-political spectrum is not a new development and is likely to continue, but the more recent Catholic-Republican trend is more problematic. If Edward Kennedy is the Democratic nominee in 1976, Republicans will have trouble holding their Catholic gain unless President Nixon delivers on his promise of parochial school aid, keeps taxes down, and makes considerably greater progress in reducing street crime. Another desideratum is more Catholic appointments to visible administration jobs, with the jackpot being a non-Irish, Catholic Republican on the Supreme Court.

Realignment in presidential elections is important, but true realignment — the kind that enables a party and its philosophy to govern effectively — is something else. That it did not occur in 1972 is at least partly the fault of the kind of campaign run by Nixon and his aids. First, there is the obvious failure of the campaign to devote more than token assistance to Republicans running for lesser office. If, as is widely believed

by professionals of both parties, the presidential election was effectively over by August at the latest, there is no excuse for the President's decision not to help other candidates. The campaign was run as if Nixon were in a neck-and-neck race, as though the slightest use of the forbidden word "Republican" would have instantly triggered a stampede of prospective Nixon voters into the McGovern ranks.

In truth, there was very little danger of this. In polls taken throughout the last three months of the campaign, most anti-McGovern Democrats and independents were not merely toying with the idea of deserting McGovern, but were absolutely determined to do so no matter what else was said and done in the campaign. Even if a Nixon appeal for lesser Republican candidates had failed, there is no reason to believe that these voters would have switched to McGovern. He was too thoroughly discredited for that. Moreover, the fact that Nixon is a Republican is hardly the country's best-kept political secret. He has, after all, run on the party's national ticket in five of the last six elections, the highest identification of a single man with a party in all of American history. In elections when he was not on the ticket, from 1954 up to and including 1970, he played the role of the slashing, abrasive party leader. No one wanted him to repeat, as a president seeking a second term, the tone of those midterm performances, but the notion that large numbers of moderate-to-conservative Democrats would have gone to McGovern as a result of being reminded that Nixon is a Republican is, in the circumstances, ludicrous.

A second reason for the Republican failure may have been the Watergate disclosures. Most poll data confirm two facts about Watergate: one, that Democratic charges and newspaper accounts had increasing impact on the voters as the campaign progressed and, two, that the disclosures hurt Nixon's candidacy little if at all. It is at least a possibility that millions of voters, disturbed by

Watergate but totally alienated by McGovern, decided to rein in the administration by voting Democratic for lesser offices. A major motivation behind the ticket-splitting trend in recent elections is the growing desire of the electorate not to put too much power in any one place, lest it be abused. November 7 was the king of all ticket-splitting elections, and Watergate may have contributed significantly to this result. Needless to say, the Republican party cannot prevail against serious opposition if large numbers of Americans come to equate a Republican administration with cynicism and corruption.

But the failure of realignment in 1972 goes, I think, considerably deeper than temporary issues or tactics. Fundamental realignments of the past — 1828, 1860, 1896, 1932 — have turned on an overwhelming issue or cognate set of issues that divided the whole country into a majority and a minority to such an extent that the division took on party lines. In 1828 and 1932 the overriding issue was control of the nation's destiny by a narrow, old-fashioned, albeit talented elite. In 1860, the issues were slavery and Union, and the country divided geographically. In 1896, the nation's miners and rural folk captured a party more thoroughly than McGovern ever dreamed of, and threatened to destroy America's industrial centers by their insistence on a single panacea, the free coinage of silver. The rural South and West voted solidly for Bryan, but the industrial East and Midwest won a victory and forged a majority for stable progress that endured until the Depression.

There was no such landmark issue in 1972. George McGovern tried to introduce one — Vietnam — but that attempt was, as the *Washington Post* stated in its post-election editorial, his single most disastrous error of the campaign. "Looking back on it now," the *Post* said, "one can easily see the magnitude of the mistake that was committed in making the Vietnam war and people's revulsion against it the centerpiece of the Democratic presidential campaign. And that is

not only (or even especially) because Mr. Nixon held all the high cards. Rather it was because the heritage of the Vietnam war remained the most politically divisive and emotionally destructive element within the Democratic party itself, the thing above all others that tended to aggravate tensions between class, generation, and region, and to bring forward suspicion, self-justification, painful memory, and the rest. The McGovern campaign thus became exclusionary in a special way. It could not and did not reach out beyond certain limits." Instead, when in the decisive summer period the McGovern people began to realize that Vietnam wouldn't do the trick, they branched briefly into other issues — tax reform, redistribution, and the rest — that contracted the McGovern base even further. In the end, the election transcended the issues, including Vietnam, and became a referendum on George McGovern, his supporters, and what their coming to power would mean to the fabric of American society.

That being said, it should not be forgotten that insofar as Nixon used issues, they were conservative issues: peace through strength, no surrender in Indochina, anti-busing, anti-crime, anti-tax. But no one issue caught on in such a way that its onus spread beyond McGovern and his immediate circle to the rest of the Democratic party. There was no realignment issue.

My own feeling is that of all the issues that sank McGovern, a single one stands out as a pro-Republican realignment issue of the future: taxation and its inseparable companion, the size and function of government. In the past decade the growth of Federal programs and spending has accelerated to the extent that the country must make a landmark decision on what government is all about. Either taxes will rise, or government will be drastically reduced. There is no third way this side of gigantic deficits and economic chaos.

By its very nature the spending-and-tax issue is one that cannot be regarded as the aberration of a single, presidential Democrat such as McGovern. If President Nixon were to mount a crusade against the size of government, the Democratic-controlled House and Senate would have to say yes or no. If they said yes, the Republican Administration would get the lion's share of the credit for obvious reasons. If they said no, and the President convinces the country that the answer must be yes, then the Republican party will have a realigning issue whose effects will be felt at all levels in 1976 and at some in 1974. For this is an issue that has to do not only with the presidency, but with the entire Congress and entire Democratic party as well.

That the President is considering moving in this direction is clear from an interview he gave to the *Washington Star-News* two days before the election. Here are just a few of his comments: "This country has enough on its plate in the way of huge new spending programs, social programs throwing dollars at problems.... Reforms using money more effectively will be the mark of this ad-

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