

Nixon-Agnew

When they finished nominating Dick Nixon at Miami Beach, the Republican delegates were far from happy at a job well done; instead, they were gloomy, glum, and dispirited. And why not? They had just nominated a two-time loser, a man who had not won any election for eighteen years, a man who inspires no enthusiasm anywhere in the country, a man consistently behind Nelson Rockefeller in the public opinion polls.

That was bad enough. But at least the delegates expected a fresh, appealing, popular face to pep up the ticket, to nail down victory in a very difficult campaign. What they got was a contempt-filled slap in the face. For they found in blank amazement that they were expected to nominate a man whom almost nobody, outside the state of Maryland, had ever heard of: Spiro T. Agnew. Aside from a few of the more honest delegations, the conventioners swallowed their pride and expressed their loyalty to the ticket; but they left that convention in moods ranging from numb despair to bitter hatred. They had desperately wanted and expected to get a vote-getter to hype the ticket; what they got was one of the most catastrophic bombs in American political history: a man who could attract no votes, but lose many because of the very cynicism of the entire operation.

Why was Agnew picked? Three reasons: What was wanted was a man who was familiar with the cities. Agnew is, but he is not popular with those few who know him, since he takes a tough “shoot-the-looters” line, a line

which instead makes him popular in the rural South. Second, he could not be vetoed by any section of the country, surely, since few had ever heard of him. Three, he agrees with Nixon's conservative views on Vietnam and looters, while being so colorless that he couldn't possibly outshine the not very colorful head of the ticket. Nixon, in short, wanted someone to run with him who was a safe, colorless cipher, to go along with a bland campaign which will rest on puerile obeisances to the flag, to motherhood, and to opposition to crime (as if anyone *favours* crime!). Nixon got that cipher in Spiro T. Agnew.

Nixon got his cipher, but in doing so Tricky Dick has outsmarted himself. He has offended not only the Republican Party, but the American people, in picking a choice so far removed from popular will or enthusiasm. Dick Nixon, like Tom Dewey twenty years ago, has managed to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory. Losing seemed a difficult thing for the Republicans this year, but the G.O.P. has once again managed this feat. Unless Hubert Humphrey manages to alienate the American public even more, Richard Nixon has had it; come November he will be a three-time loser, and it couldn't happen to a more deserving fellow, or to a more deserving party.