

McGovern: historians will indict U.S.

by STEVE COHN
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Sen. George McGovern, the first announced candidate for the Presidency of the United States, occupies the Senate office formerly assigned to John F. Kennedy. Its walls and shelves are filled with photographs and other memorabilia that give the room a JFK-RFK presence.

Also well-represented is Abraham Lincoln, with a portrait, three small statues and a desk condensation of his writings. This is the context of the McGovern presidential candidacy, finding its political perspective in the liberal tradition of the Democratic Party.

What emerges from the interview is the obvious fact that the senator feels very deeply about the war and about poor people in this country. He approaches these issues from an almost common-sense perspective, and seems to reject ideological explications and solutions for them, denying the argument that foreign intervention and domestic inequality are deeply rooted in the U.S. "free enterprise" system. He speaks for a foreign policy that would

seek to actively coexist with communist nations, and sees no economic contradictions in this.

At home, he talks in terms of radically reordered priorities. The cultural politics of the student movement is a far less urgent question than the immediate needs of the poor. He claims that liberal politics can speak to these needs.

The aura of power and politics that would be expected to surround a presidential candidate does not accompany McGovern. His presence is that of a good man, and it is an impression that grows after leaving his office.

Q. Some politicians have made campus freedom and dissent a scare issue, and have called for severe reprisals, such as cutting of scholarship and loan funds, against students and faculty who disrupt "normal campus activity." Do you perceive these developments to be a serious threat to free speech?

A. Yes, I do. I think the federal government has to stay out of the area of campus discipline. If there is any one factor that is more precious

than anything else on a university campus, it is its freedom. The federal government is neither competent nor does it have the right to move into that area. The university community is going to have to establish its own rules.

Q. A lot of the student movement today is based not on a political analysis but on a cultural one. The movement talks in terms of the quest for community, meaningful work, reform, etc. What sympathy would you have for the cultural perspective of the movement?

A. Well, I think that is a legitimate concern. Students recognize more than rhetoric will be required to deal with our problems. I think what bothers students and older people alike is the enormous gap between professions on the part of politicians and what we actually do. . . . that to me is the biggest single political problem in this country today, to earn the confidence of people in the words of government officials.

Q. It has been said that a lot of the students are seeking an alternative life-style to the current materialist posture that is offered in American society. One suggestion is a guaranteed minimum income for all, without a work provision. Would you favor that?

A. I think the concern of students about the materialism of our society is a legitimate one. Actually we have been taught for years in the churches and in our religious heritage to recognize that fact—that the claims of life and brotherhood are more important than the claims of materialism. For my own self I think a higher priority than guaranteeing an income for every citizen in this country is to begin by guaranteeing a job for everyone who wants to work. I think that to many students the importance of that is not fully appreciated. But to the poor man living in Harlem or the South Bronx, the most urgent thing right now is a decent job. That's true with the poor of this country all across the nation. I think the highest single priority right now would be for the federal government to say we are going to do what we can to build the kind of economy where people can find work at a decent wage in the private sector, but failing that we will guarantee a range of public service jobs, not just make-work jobs but things that are in the public interest for anyone who wishes to work.

Q. Do you believe that the volunteer army concept threatens to put too much power in the hands of the military. And wouldn't a volunteer army produce enlisted ranks composed even more disproportionately of the poor and the blacks?

A. I don't buy either one of those assumptions. I think that we ought to go back to a voluntary system. . . . that's been the traditional American way of recruiting military manpower. The danger of a military takeover comes when the civilians quit doing their job as the responsible managers of the military. If the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the Congress of the United States will abide by the Constitution we can head off the danger of a military takeover whether we have a volunteer army or we have a draft. With regard to the all black, all Puerto Rican, all Mexican-American or whatever



McGovern . . . "a good man."

term you want to use to describe the composition of the volunteer force, I think that right now under the draft system you have a disproportionate percentage of black and poor people in the armed forces. By going to a volunteer system at least you would pay those people a living wage and you would have to compete in the open market for support and enlistments.

Q. Would you be in support of the planned April 24th anti-war demonstration in Washington? It is called in the legal and peaceful style of last year's moratorium.

A. From the practical standpoint I question what the impact of those demonstrations is on public opinion anymore. I participated in both the mobilization and the moratorium a year or so ago, and I was disappointed in the impact they had on public opinion. It's hard to keep somebody from standing up and waving a Viet Cong flag, and unfortunately that's what the television networks focus on. It leaves the implication that nobody is against the war except for a few extreme radicals and Viet Cong sympathizers, whereas when the polls are taken it shows that the American people overwhelmingly oppose the war.

Q. South Vietnamese troops have invaded Laos with American tactical support. There is a massive U.S. presence literally hovering over the combat in Cambodia. Do you foresee a Senate attempt to expand the Cooper-Church Amendment to preclude unequivocally an American participation in the fighting in these two countries?

A. What I would hope is that we could not only do that with the Cooper-Church Amendment but that we would go beyond that to the McGovern-Hatfield which terminates all military operations in Indochina. The heart of the problem is that the United States is fundamentally mistaken in intervening in a revolutionary struggle in Southeast Asia.

Q. The President has proposed a military budget of

77.5 billion dollars, aside from Indochina expenses. Do you believe this sum can be reduced?

A. Well, it can be reduced by cutting out a new generation of weapons that we don't really need. Included in that 77 billion is the ABM that we don't need, the MIRV system which we don't need. Included is a new Cadillac air-condition tank which we don't need, included is several billion dollars in new expenditures for the navy that go beyond any real security needs, included is the new B-1 bomber, which before it is fully constructed will probably cost 12-15 billion dollars. Those are all things that go beyond any reasonable defense needs. Also included is the assumption that we are going to maintain indefinitely 300,000 soldiers in Western Europe (with 200,000 dependents) at a cost of some 14 billion dollars a year.

Q. What do you think of the testimony emanating from the Winter Soldier hearings now being held in Detroit and the war crimes hearings in general that have been held across the country by Vietnam veterans?

A. I think that the charges that have been brought by these young men, all veterans of combat in Vietnam, not only deserve a hearing, but need to be understood by the members of Congress and by the American people. What they are saying in effect is that the war itself implicates American soldiers. . . . in acts of atrocity because of the very nature of the war. Now really what is the difference between bombing or shelling with artillery 70 percent of Quang Ngai Province, which we have done, and what Lt. William Calley and his men apparently did. We are all implicated in the slaughter of the innocent in Southeast Asia. Someday historians looking back on this war are going to indict this country for our involvement in Indochina. They are going to point to the fact that perhaps a million innocent South Vietnamese civilians have been killed by the massive military technology of the United States. That is a terrible burden to have on the conscience of this country.

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