

CONVENTION COMMENTS



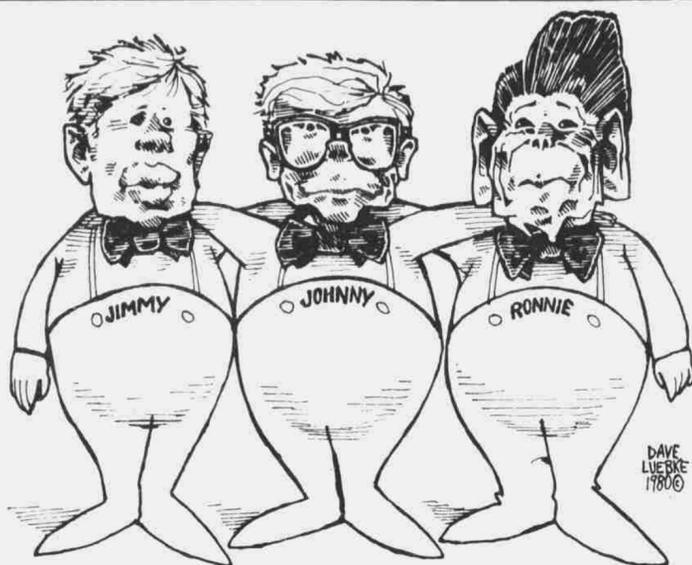
An ardent party activist at the Democratic National Convention in New York City.



New York protestors advocate "Nobody for President."



Ronald Reagan and wife Nancy acknowledge cheering delegates in Detroit.



Conventions' glory lost on disenchanting voters

Editor's note: Kathy Chenault attended both the Republican and Democratic national conventions during the summer. Here, she comments on her experience.

An unemployed 20-year-old man sat on the sidewalk across from Madison Square Garden last August sipping beer from a bottle.

He yawned, then excused himself, saying he was tired from not having anything to do.

"Having no job can really wear you out. You know what I mean?"

"But then, it's been so long since I've worked at all, so how the hell should I know?" He shrugged and looked at the downtown electricity generated by the combined high-voltage currents of the Democratic National Convention and the daily rustling of street life in New York.

The young man said he was pleased to have found someone to listen to his viewpoint on just another August morning in the nation's largest city.

"I JUST wanted to come down and see what these people look like. You know, they're the ones running the country and I just wanted to see what they're like, you know?"

Another slow, seemingly pleasurable swallow of beer, and the native New Yorker continued.

"The whole political mess is just that—a mess. I mean, it's always the same thing. All these people wave flags, wear funny hats and make speeches. But nothing ever changes."

"I still don't find work and every day my girlfriend gets closer to having our baby. But yet, these people go to their parties and talk about how great we have things in this country."

He paused, took a long draw from the sweating brown bottle and smiled. It was a slow, cynical, almost haunting grin that creased his face.

"Of course, I have to admit that feeling great's the way to be. I was feeling great this morning when I found enough change for this beer."

HE RAISED the bottle in the air and tilted it slightly as if offering a toast to the myriads of people bustling on and along Seventh Avenue. Then he quickly finished the remaining sloshes of his breakfast beer.

"Hey, thanks for listening." With that he stood up and padded barefoot into the crowd. He was gone . . . just another faceless body.

Now, as the autumn colors begin to blush the landscape signaling that the national election is approaching rapidly, the attitudes of people across the country seem

to parallel those feelings expressed in August by the young man observing life on the fringes of one of the biggest political events of the year.

This year, however, is different from most election years. This year, the widespread lack of involvement and disinterest toward politics cannot be attributed to that favorite cause—voter apathy. At least, that explanation cannot accurately reflect the sentiments of the citizenry in 1980.

THIS YEAR, people are not asking, "Who cares?"

Instead, these people are saying they care about the problems they see, problems they feel.

These people are concerned about the floundering economy, worried about the role the United States assumes in foreign affairs and afraid of faltering social programs here at home.

A midwestern farmer scoffs when asked who he will vote for.

"It kind of comes down to the difference between bad and worse," he said. "Reagan might do some things that will be bad. But Carter has already shown us he can come up with much worse."

A Detroit housewife admired the press credentials hanging around the neck of a reporter during the Republican National Convention in mid-July.

"The whole thing is so exciting. But I don't suppose it's too important to anyone who's not from here. At least that's the way I am not interested unless something directly affects me."

SHE ADDED that she thought the most important aspect of the convention was what it would do for the city of Detroit.

A middle-aged woman from the Bronx browsing in a downtown New York department store warned visitors to the city to be careful during the convention.

"There's just so much human trash around these days," she said, shaking the tousled curls on her head.

"Once I get home each day I'm there to stay. Now ain't that a fine life? Scared to go anywhere, so I lock myself in."

What the United States needs, the woman said, is a leader who can turn things around.

She said there is no question in her mind who to support in the presidential election.

"IF KENNEDY would have been a candidate it would be close. But it's Reagan all the way. He'll add some class to the White House," she said.

"Besides, his wife's so pretty."

The number of "undecideds" in the general populace is increasing dramatically. In



fact, it seems the only people genuinely interested in the election are active party members and the families and campaign camps of the candidates.

People are not just turning away. They are turning, and turning, and turning . . . They are thrashing—perhaps drowning—in a tumultuous sea of discontent, displeasure and disgust.

Who are the perpetrators of these queasy, tortuous feelings rampant among American citizens?

If that question were posed to people across the country the answer would be a resounding, "The candidates themselves."

People are worried.

FROM THE MAN in New York with no job, disheartened and weary, to a 24-year-old public utilities worker in western Nebraska who says the diminishing influence of the United States could translate into full-scale war for Americans within the next few years; they are concerned, scared.

"I care about the country and I care about my future. That includes my safety, which is being threatened more and more each day," the utilities worker said.

"But I don't care one way or another about the presidential contest. In my opinion, there's nobody running. I'll just vote for who's winning at the time and let him blow it once he gets in office."

A salesman from South Dakota summarized his opinion of the attitudes of the American people toward the national election by comparing the presidential campaign to gambling.

"It's like they went to Vegas to select the candidates. They put a quarter in the slot machine, pulled the lever and they all came up lemons." Pleased with his clever comparison, the man continued.

"They're all gambling when they open their mouths . . . shooting crap, that is."

THE NEW YORK woman wants to be free to come and go from her home without fearing for her life. Detroit workers want to increase automobile production, a sign of a prospering economy. Farmers, who perennially ask for assistance so they can keep the United States the agricultural powerhouse of the world, would like support similar to the help given to the Chrysler Corporation.

The young man in New York wants to work. He wants to feel good about himself.

Unfortunately, the common thread lacking the opinions of American people together is a fear of the chances (or lack of chances) for finding solutions to their problems during the next four years. In conservative terms, the chances for a real winner is viewed by many as a long shot.

Analysis and photos by Kathy Chenault