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Mark Acuff
The Nebraska Affair

I

WORKING IN SENATOR McCARTHY'S CAMPAIGN quickly gives one a sense of having landed in a science-fiction fantasy world. You think you know where, when, and what you're doing, but things tend to dissolve at the limits of perception, lending a shimmer of unreality. McCarthy's Presidential effort has not really been a *campaign* in the normal and traditional sense. Rather, it has been a sort of national Happening, bringing the strangest of fellows to bed, assaulting common sense and assailing logic with ultimate abandon.

McCarthy shouldn't have been running for the Presidency at all. It defied every tradition in the history books and upset the normal machinations of Democratic politics throughout the country. And if McCarthy does not now get the nomination of his party, despite leading the popular polls, the reason will be apparent in the wreckage of the party structure about him. The "movement" the Senator brought forth from the body politic has, from the point of view of the party regulars, grown into a rampaging virus rubbing rawly at every synapse of the traditional political structure.

Even politicians who would not mind seeing McCarthy elected President are terrified at the prospect of hundreds and thousands of McCarthy troopers storming into precinct caucuses, upsetting plans and structures which required generations to construct.

Politicians are, by nature, somewhat less than the most imaginative members of society. Their normal bent is to seek security in formalized structures held together by patronage. The Kennedy brothers developed the art of dangling postmasterships before local chieftains, and the success of the Kennedys is enough evidence that it is not your ideology or the style of your campaign which upsets the local minions of the party. Rather, it is how you play the game. The state Democratic chairman of Iowa, for instance, went on record to the effect that an "Un-American" invasion had turned his precinct and county caucuses inside out and wrought havoc throughout the state. Who were these

un-American conspirators? They were the people of Iowa, the rank and file, many attending a caucus for the first time in their lives.

In the process, of course, the rank and file did not stop at the discovery of the mechanics of party politics. They went on to throw out county chairmen, elect new and unknown committeemen, and threaten the very foundation of the traditional system.

Rare is the politician capable of anticipating such a development, of reading the runes on the wall and moving accordingly. Such a rare one is Filo Sedillo, longtime chairman of Valencia County, New Mexico. Sedillo can hardly be called a brash upstart, yet his votes provided the margin which produced a victory for proportional representation and netted McCarthy 45% of the delegation at the New Mexico State Convention. Whatever happens in the future, Sedillo and his crew will be in the middle of it. But more typically, the tradition-bound county chairmen and local political leaders in every state reacted to the McCarthy movement with somewhat the same emotions they might feel in the presence of the Black Plague.

I have no idea what will become of the McCarthy "movement." But I am certain that it is far more important than any of the issues raised in the campaign to date—more important than early settlement of the war, more important than relief for the ghettos, and far more important than the solution of the balance of payments problem. For in a way the problem of the ghettos and the poor is linked closely with McCarthy's middle-class movement, though perhaps only a few Blacks see it that way. And the exasperation and helplessness so painful to the youth of the prosperous middle class, though we call the problem "alienation," is not, at base, much different from the disfranchisement of the black man and the urban poor.

Assorted Swedes and Frenchmen have been warning us for years that our inherently most difficult problem will be the adaptation of democracy to a technological culture with a population of hundreds of millions. Today, however, it is not only the Black and the poor and the young who feel powerless to affect the machinations of the system. In the last half of the 20th century, the smog-bound, tax-hounded, and radar-trapped suburbanite also feels cast adrift in a sea of technocracy where no one cares and, worse, no one listens.

To my way of thinking, the failure of the system to provide a mechanism for the people to involve themselves in the ordering of government and society is more to blame for riots, arson and crime waves than any immediate economic and social deprivation. And George Wallace

is every bit as much the benefactor of this upwelling of frustration as is McCarthy.

When Senator McCarthy developed the gall to toss his previously untrampled hat into the New Hampshire ring, I am sure he had little if any notion that by his act he would arouse the unbounded energies of countless numbers of persons from all walks of life—not all of them young—who had been searching, if unconsciously, for some way to make their mark on the social fabric.

At this writing, the campaign has done so well that McCarthy no longer considers it "his" but rather the embodiment of the yearning of millions to participate, to have a voice in the ordering of their society.

Time will show what will happen and the political analysts will tell us what it means. One element seems most obvious: Americans want relevant government substructures in which they can participate directly. This does not necessarily imply that the federal government should be dismantled, for the state and local governments of the country are uniformly less representative and less adaptive than the federal. Decentralization itself may not be the answer, if it results only in spreading the same problems. In some way we need new institutions to which the electorate can relate.

Perhaps, ultimately, the message of the mass movement aroused by McCarthy will lead to the presentation of plans to redraw state lines to make them relevant; to establish regional substructures; to abolish counties; or any number of other previously wild-sounding notions. But the verdict is clear: Americans, though they may not have a precise notion of what they want, are fed up with government by negotiation between interest groups and professional politicians. This is not to say that "politician" must remain a dirty word. The Greeks considered politics the highest of the arts of man. So does McCarthy, and the results of his efforts imply clearly that many of us would like to accord politicians that regard, were it possible.

Whatever the Senator's future, whether he is elected President, or whether he even returns to the Senate, he has already made this singular contribution: he has given voice to the aspirations of America, and America will never be the same.

II

I first heard that McCarthy would become a genuine candidate for the Presidency in November of 1967, considerably before the formal

announcement and long before many took the idea seriously (many still don't).

I heard it from an unusual source, a man who was virtually an unknown, yet a man who may be one of the prime movers in seeking a new kind of America in the years to come. His name is Allard Lowenstein, and I found him resplendent in his usual dirty windbreaker and T-shirt in the student union at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. He carried a lumpy, monstrous bag, full of assorted propaganda and ancient inscrutable tracts, but a bag certain to contain a "speech-making" coat and tie somewhere in its interminable depths.

Lowenstein had come to the university in his capacity as leader of the newly formed "Dump Johnson Movement." This was not his name for it but that supplied by the press, which at that time regarded Lowenstein as fit only for a leprosarium.

An early president of the National Student Association, Al had fought the far left in the formative years of the country's national union of students, then fought bitterly to prevent NSA's fall into the arms of the Central Intelligence Agency. Meanwhile, he smuggled himself and associates in and out of Southwest Africa, wrote a book about that, came to be close to Eleanor Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson, and served on Hubert Humphrey's staff as an advisor on international affairs. I came to know Lowenstein through NSA, to which he often returned to regale the youngsters with marvelous stories and passionate pleas for social justice. A truly outstanding public speaker, he moves audiences as no one else in modern America.

In a way, Lowenstein invented the McCarthy movement, for it was he who acted as the catalyst to bring aimless frustrations and rancor into the political system and point the way toward effective and affirmative effort. Few others believed it could be done, and in San Francisco there was talk of blowing up Pacific Gas and Electric as the only way to get the establishment to pay attention.

The response to Lowenstein's effort was overwhelming, in the sense that it drew far more response from a much wider group than anyone had anticipated. His effort led first to McCarthy's decision that it might be possible to do something by running in New Hampshire, and then to the evocation of that mass movement which we now think of as McCarthy's movement—though the Senator himself keeps attempting to explain that it is obviously no one's movement, that he is as much its follower as its leader.

Lowenstein's New York organization grew by leaps and bounds

until it was capable of running full-page ads in the *Sunday Times*. The rising bitterness against the Johnson Administration so impressed those who happened to be watching that it quickly became obvious this was no ordinary fractious splinter wing of New York Reform Democrats but a genuine force to be reckoned with.

McCarthy was watching, and listening to the reports of his own college-age children, predictably in the thick of it. When the effort grew to respectable proportions, McCarthy brought his hockey stick down from the attic and set out for the snows of New Hampshire.

But the movement, as seems to be the fate of all social institutions, quickly became the victim of Parkinson's inescapable laws of bureaucratic behavior. Internal mechanisms proliferated and empire-building set in, until chaos became the norm at National McCarthy for President Headquarters. By the time the newborn "organization" had moved into its quarters in the Transportation Building in Washington's business district, three identifiable battalions had lined up to fight for control, with nebulous and shifting sub-groups in formation each hour of the day.

The first and foremost of the squads involved in the strife was, of course, the Lowenstein-oriented Conference of Concerned Democrats/Coalition for a Democratic Alternative group, which felt, with some justice, that it had invented the whole thing. Second, McCarthy's Senate staff got into the act, somewhat wonderingly and slightly aghast at the prospect of having to work with a group of urban radicals over which it had no apparent control.

Relations between these two groups took on a curious pattern bearing some resemblance to the Paris negotiations with the North Vietnamese, where emissaries and messages are sent back and forth according to formal protocol but fruitful discussions have to wait for coffee breaks and cocktail parties.

Third, a national staff coalesced out of the Washington nebulae, developing its own independent stake in the affairs of the over-all operation.

Still in the process of formation at that time was a faction of unpredictable import which later became the key to much of the campaign: the student army, headed by Sam Brown, a Harvard divinity student who had only recently lost a narrow contest for the presidency of the National Student Association. Allied with Brown and his cohorts were the Washington student-establishments of NSA and the U.S. Student Press Association, which by that time had turned its College Press

Service into a virtual anti-Vietnam and pro-McCarthy propaganda organ. This, incidentally, created great difficulties for the student press: large university members were calling for more vitriol, while smaller members pleaded for mercy.

Historians may find it interesting that Lowenstein was the first to bite the dust as the campaign took form. The voluble, energetic and boisterous *New Yorker* was more than McCarthy's nerves could take. The Senator cannot tolerate table-thumpers, and Lowenstein may be the last of the great thumpers.

Early in December at the Chicago Conference of Concerned Democrats, called essentially by Lowenstein, to launch the McCarthy campaign, Lowenstein delivered a shouting, podium-pounding assault on the Johnson administration which brought the audience to its feet and to the verge of taking to the barricades. All of this appalled the mild Senator from Minnesota, who vowed he would never again appear on the same platform with Lowenstein. This was unfortunate, to say the least. Lowenstein's brilliance and unique ability to interact with people at all levels might have brought a greater coherence to the campaign and avoided some of the staff-shuffling which afflicted it right through the California primary in June.

To head his national campaign staff, McCarthy picked Blair Clark, an ex-CBS News executive. A genial man with the most affable of manners, Clark is in the McCarthy image, and wouldn't conceive of pounding a table or raising his voice. But being a journalist first and an intellectual second, Clark proved no more capable of arranging the logistics and mechanics of a national campaign than I would. His role, albeit a very important one, has been that of front man for the campaign, presenting the proper image to the press and public.

Into the organization gap stepped Curtis "Curt" Gans, another product of national student politics, in this case by way of the University of North Carolina, United Press International, and a stint on the staff of Americans for Democratic Action. Gans is a unique individual, and one of the few humans able to subsist on a steady diet of Coca Cola and cigarettes. His intensity is such that he radiates a field of acute discomfort of sufficient magnitude to produce squirms and twitches for blocks. Originally a participant in Lowenstein's effort to establish support for an anti-administration position among Democrats throughout the country, Gans eventually assumed the position of chief of staff in the McCarthy campaign. Meanwhile, he had gone into New Hamp-

shire when things were toughest, marshalled the students and arranged the logistical pattern that was to bring off the headline-producing result for McCarthy.

The student troops were perhaps the key to New Hampshire. Perhaps. The youth of the country materialized out of thin air in New Hampshire, coming by the busload, hitchhiking, driving six to a Volkswagen, even walking, to do anything they could to help. Gans and Brown organized the chaotic multitude into an effective force.

But still—perhaps. In retrospect it is very difficult to assess the impact of the volunteer student army in New Hampshire, or in any of the primaries. It may well be that New Hampshire, like much of the rest of the country, was itching for a chance to repudiate the Johnson administration's inept guidance of foreign affairs—or, even more likely, was appreciative of the opportunity to repudiate the traditional political system in general by voting for an "anti-politician" who appeared to be running in defiance of the normal order of things as much as running for the Presidency. With hindsight, it appears to me that McCarthy's good fortune in New Hampshire, and later in Oregon, rested more on his utilization of the mass media to present himself as a cogent alternative to the existing situation and as an agent for alteration of the system, than it did on mass canvassing or any amount of committee formation or block and ward work. Regardless, the mass campaign effort did provide an involvement mechanism for thousands of young people, including some who had been on the verge of dropping out of the system altogether, and even a few who had toyed with violent methods to jolt society from its complacency. The McCarthy effort offered all of them a means to make a dent in the social fabric without rending it beyond repair.

Should the result of this year's electoral process be simply the as-predicted nomination of Humphrey and Nixon, many of these youngsters will, no doubt, plunge back into the depths of despair, and the arguments of the Bay Area anarchists will gain new strength. But, I hope, a significant number will come away with the feeling that though they may not have won the complete battle, their efforts contributed to a remarkable shift in national policy.

It is difficult now to recall the dark days of last fall, when the country seemed locked into a doomed spiral of escalation and killing in Vietnam and it appeared virtually impossible for the individual American to find a way to express his outrage through regular channels.

Things have changed. Drastically. No matter who is nominated in August, the America of the fall of 1968 will be aimed down a far different road than it was a year previously.

III

Nebraska is an odd place for a transplanted New Mexican to find himself. When first offered a job in the state, I hesitated, telling the employer frankly that if there is a capital of the Flat Earth Society, it must be in Nebraska. I was right about that, as it turned out. But the job was too good to pass up, so early in 1967 I landed in the Meat Packing Center of the World.

That I found myself directing the Nebraska McCarthy campaign effort after only a year there speaks eloquently of the political conditions in this forlorn and often forgotten prairie state. The fact was, quite simply, that there was no one else with an established position of some respect in the state willing to lend his name to the cause. There still isn't.

Kennedy's agents found not ample but sufficient numbers of henchmen in Nebraska, some left over from past disasters (Nixon stomped JFK by a landslide in Nebraska—it was Nixon's best state), some attracted to the glories of Camelot, and some smelling postmasterships in the air. The Kennedy supporters included a few hardened pros who thought they saw the handwriting on the wall and hoped to line up on the winning side. They remained generally conservative Democrats in a party long intimidated by the overwhelming Republicanism of the state. Augmented by teenyboppers, they were able to erect a passable facade, pump it full of cash (almost entirely from outside Nebraska), and mount a respectable campaign.

But the McCarthy forces could turn up nothing more than a few college students and an occasional professor. Not a single politician in the state was ready to lay his career on the line for McCarthy—as Curt Gans found out in pointed terms.

Gans made the first entrée into Nebraska. His aggressive demeanor and Eastern intensity evoked a negative response among Nebraska politicians of such vehemence that, after a year in the state, I was still hard put to explain it. One young lawyer, a liberal Democrat (in Nebraska terms) and a potential Congressional candidate, claimed he threw Gans out of his office.

As a result, the Senator's campaigns picked up steam in every state except Nebraska (Indiana, though, was almost as bad), without a single

Nebraskan of any importance willing to lend even his name, much less work or money, to the effort.

Part of the explanation for this dismal state of affairs lies in the nature of Nebraska's headlong rush toward total entropy. Once the home of Midwestern radicalism (now only dimly remembered), Nebraska was destroyed politically by the Depression and the political exorcism to which it was subjected in the thirties. During those hard years when plains ranchers were baling tumbleweed to feed gaunt cattle, a large proportion of Nebraska's younger citizens took off for greener pastures in the West. Interestingly, I met numbers of Nebraskans in Oregon, especially in east slope irrigated farming areas, most of whom vowed they would never return, except perhaps to visit grandmother.

In the ensuing three decades Nebraska became a place, in the words of embittered ex-Nebraskan Ted Sorensen, "young men leave and old men-go to die." Poignantly, Nebraska's famous men of the day are all expatriates, the Sorensens among them. Denizens of the state point to Johnny Carson and assorted lesser luminaries as the product of the Cornhusker State—none of whom has seen fit to make a life in his native domain.

Nebraska's newspapers and educators recurrently decry the "brain drain" which cripples the economy and afflicts the cultural life, and resolve to mend the situation by creating new opportunities. But seldom if ever does the resolve take concrete form. Salaries are lower than in neighboring industrial areas, spending on education lags far behind, and money for public works is almost unheard of. Those who remain behind fall essentially into two categories: those who have "made it," either by inheritance or good fortune, and those who don't have the money or the courage to strike out for new horizons.

Obviously, a society where the power structure is composed of those with a vested interest in the status quo, and where all dissidents are removed by exmigration, will not change at a particularly rapid pace. This is not to say that there are no Nebraskans who long for their state to get back in step with the rest of the world. But they are few and far between; they tend to become embittered and eventually throw in the towel and head for the nameless suburban streets of Sunnyvale, California, or the like. Virtually all Nebraskans seem to be saving up to retire in some other clime—preferably as soon as possible.

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Omaha, that astounding unmetropolis on the Missouri, is at the core of enervation. An urb which never quite grew into a city, Omaha itself

is composed of thousands of transplants from the desiccated small towns of Nebraska and Iowa. A large proportion of its residents, particularly young executives and professionals, see it only as a temporary watering hole on the long trek to a more civilized place. Needless to say, it is more difficult to mobilize political activity in a situation where the majority of the population couldn't care less.

Those Omahans who remain behind, those who have little hope of departing for California or Florida, grow deeply resentful of those who can pick up stakes. In turn, they become increasingly embittered and hostile towards the rest of the country and its problems, particularly the eastern seaboard.

For years Nebraska took immense pride in being the "white spot" of the nation, with no income tax and no sales tax, financing myriad tiny school districts strictly from local property taxes. The one-room school house with the non-degreed teacher has persisted longer in Nebraska than anywhere else in the nation. As a result, Nebraskans don't know a great deal about the outside world, and don't especially desire to find out. In this most of their news media reinforce them daily. The *Omaha World-Herald* covers Nebraska and much of western Iowa like a blanket. A wet blanket. The paper's prejudices and jaundiced world outlook are so inbred and traditional that its staff members are no longer aware of it. Dozens of fairly talented young men toil daily in its stifling mold, under the misapprehension that they are part of a great metropolitan daily. Television in Nebraska is also thoroughly unimaginative and it follows where the *World-Herald* leads, reinforcing Nebraskans' fears and prejudices about the real world outside their boundaries. Even the state's seven educational TV stations fall under this pall.

Partisan politics were destroyed in Nebraska during the thirties, and have never recovered. Though the non-partisan League and many weird offshoots of populism flourished throughout the plains states, nowhere was such an imprint left as in Nebraska, mostly to the detriment of subsequent political evolution.

George Norris, champion maverick of all time, managed to turn Nebraska inside out during his boisterous life. He is remembered fondly as a man who turned the national spotlight on the Cornhusker State (every year an attempt is mounted to change the nickname to something "less corny"), but the remnants of his tenure have crippled politics there. Specifically, Norris ramrodded the non-partisan unicameral Legislature into existence, just in time to call its first session to

order in a monstrous new capitol designed for a bicameral legislature. (The other chamber is used for committee meetings and auditions of proposed state songs.)

Most politically aware Americans know that it is called simply The Unicameral. But seemingly no one is aware that the Unicameral is non-partisan.

Unicameralism has worked quite well, and has much to recommend it to the other 49 bicameral states. But non-partisanship has been a disaster. Without a recognizable party leadership in the Legislature, party platforms are meaningless, party structures often irrelevant. In fact, there often is no party structure to speak of between gubernatorial and/or Presidential elections, and gubernatorial candidates have learned to run as semi-non-partisan candidates, though tainted with a party label. While in most states the legislature is the breeding ground for political leaders of stature, Nebraska's Unicameral has failed to produce a single individual of Congressional or Senatorial timber.

Original approval of the non-partisan legislature may have been somewhat freakish, since Norris managed to include it on the same ballot with repeal of Prohibition and approval of pari-mutuel wagering. But once in, it has proved almost impossible to remove, though some stalwart souls are still trying.

Non-partisanship has made it particularly difficult for the minority Democrats to mount an effective assault on the statehouse. With no structure through which to present a party legislative platform and no party loyalists on legislative committees, it is virtually impossible for the party, qua party, to have a voice in state affairs. The majority Republicans continue to control the Unicameral, though somewhat nebulously, and alliances are fleeting and shifting, with little regard for party lines.

With such minuscule possibilities for effective action through the party structure, it is little wonder that most Nebraskans greet the prospect of involvement in partisan politics with a massive yawn. Even the state's heavily Democratic wards tend to elect Republicans, and the current five-man Congressional delegation is probably the most right-wing in the nation.

Frank Morrison, a Democrat, managed to serve two terms as governor of the state, at least partly on the premise of preventing "dirty old partisan politics" from encroaching into state government. Morrison's tenure in the statehouse left the party exactly as he had found it—impotent. And Nebraska's organized Democrats have subsisted through

the long, lean years on little more than crumbs from Washington in periods of Democratic control of the White House and occasional infusions of money for national elections.

The Kennedy team built up the most effective force of Nebraska Democrats in many years during the 1960 effort. But the results were so depressing that Robert Kennedy openly hoped he would never have to set foot in Nebraska again. But times change, and RFK found himself back eight years later, winning a new sort of primary election largely in a vacuum, struggling against the straw man of non-candidate Johnson and a McCarthy organization crippled by a negative balance in the treasury and the wound inflicted the week before in Indiana.

Nebraska's wide-open new primary law, untested before 1968, was an offspring of the 1964 Goldwater campaign. In Nebraska, as elsewhere, Goldwater's more hydrophobic supporters raided the party structure, stuffing caucuses and blitzing conventions until they had wrested control. No deviation from orthodoxy was permitted. These Goldwater tactics appalled a sizable number of the state's mild Republicans. They were moved to support a wide-open primary, making control of the party machinery essentially irrelevant to Presidential politics. The new law was written in such a way that the Secretary of State was empowered to place on the ballot the names of all and sundry who appeared to him to be genuine Presidential candidates, as well as those who organized any kind of campaign effort in the state and asked to be added. Only a formal affidavit of non-candidacy could remove a man's name. Only Nelson Rockefeller filed such an affidavit.

The number of delegates to the national convention was set in the law at two for each of the three Congressional districts, plus 22 at large. On the eve of the election the McCarthy camp was uncertain that they had enough candidates for delegate to make up a full slate. Filing fees had been paid by the organization for about half of the slate, composed of a motley collection of college students, teachers, and housewives. Then true to form (the strange form of the McCarthy campaign, that is) a group of people rushed in at the last minute to file as delegates for McCarthy at the precise moment that I had filed an exact full slate. I had hoped to limit McCarthy votes to precisely the right number of delegate candidates, a technique which had paid off in New Hampshire. We therefore wound up with a surplus of candidates in the at-large category and in one Congressional district.

But to go back in time, the McCarthy effort began in earnest in Nebraska after Blair Clark's initial January foray into the wilderness to

line up something in the state. He found a grand total of five people willing to meet with him, two of them journalists who could not become actively committed, and one of them my wife. One of the other two was a political science professor, David Evans, then in the process of being fired because of a controversy at his college. The last was a graduate student at the University in Lincoln who had earlier rounded up a group of concerned students.

Clark was utterly dismayed at his first encounter with Nebraska's apathy. He could not find a single leader with any political experience willing and able to put his neck on the chopping block for McCarthy. Thus it quickly became apparent that one of the tiny group would have to do the job, and having no children and no contractual obligations, I was the only one who could undertake the task of becoming a full-time McCarthy worker in the state. Thus it was that a transplanted New Mexican with only a year's exposure to Nebraska, and all of that in Omaha, became Executive Director of the yet to be formed Nebraska McCarthy for President Committee.

Filled with foreboding, I agreed to take on the job. It seemed the least one could do at a time when others, particularly the Senator himself, were risking their careers for the kind of America we believed in. I asked the McCarthy organization to pay my regular salary for the period, so that at least I would be secure from sudden economic disaster during the campaign, should it fold suddenly (at that time it could have folded any minute). Half the salary was paid, the rest is still only a promise.

Promises were also tendered of substantial sums to organize the campaign. Instead, small sums arrived months later, and promises of certain amounts by certain dates were uniformly shattered dreams. By the time the first dribble of cash came in from Washington, I had already used up a good deal of my initial salary on postage and minor expenditures. Obviously, little could be done with no initial capitalization. What was done was largely through the efforts of a few local McCarthy supporters, chief among them Warren Buffett, son of an isolationist Republican congressman from Nebraska, who raised a few hundred dollars.

Charged with finding a "name" chairman for the state organization, I beat innumerable bushes throughout the state, finding only bushes. Offers of sub rosa help came from a few insiders in the political structure, but nothing public or tangible. The same attitude was expressed in countless phone calls to my home. Cautious Omahans called to say

they would like to help McCarthy, but feared their neighbors might not understand.

In due course, David Evans, a former member of Governor Morrison's staff and a talented if about-to-be-unemployed political scientist who hopes for a future in state politics, was appointed State Chairman. Literally, I had no one else to anoint, despite Evans' lack of fame and/or notoriety.

The main' corps of volunteers came, naturally, from the University in Lincoln, augmented by a few troops from the traditionally phlegmatic small schools of Omaha. Leading the students and faculty members at Lincoln were Michael Oldfather, a graduate student who had formed a Nebraska chapter of Concerned Democrats, and Gene Pokorny, the talented vice president of the University's student government. As in other states, the hard, dirty work of the campaign was done by students, who worked long hours with considerable verve.

In Omaha, surprising numbers of people seemed to materialize out of the atmosphere as the McCarthy campaign became respectable, or almost so, after New Hampshire and Wisconsin. An office staff was organized and managed to do a creditable job with severely limited materials and funds.

We rented a small office on the ground floor of Omaha's traditional "political hotel," the decrepit and crumbling Sheraton-Fontenelle. (Jack Bell, veteran Associated Press political writer, once remarked to me while traversing the catacombs of the Fontenelle, "Gad, I was in this place two decades ago and it hasn't changed at all.") From our four-by-four cubicle we enjoyed an excellent vantage point for observation of the trucks unloading coffers of gold for the large Kennedy headquarters upstairs.

What money we were able to raise came in by dribbles. We published the same ads in the daily papers which brought in tens of thousands of dollars in the East, such as the "Your Children Have Come Home" spread picturing McCarthy with beaming youngsters. Apparently most Nebraskans would rather their children didn't come home. The ads brought in far less than their cost. In fact, ads costing as much as \$1,500 failed to bring in \$100 in contributions, thereby astounding McCarthy workers from other states.

Occasionally a courageous Nebraskan answered an ad or "mailer" in an affirmative way—we did get a few hundred responses. But at least three-fourths of the response forms were returned with the "contribution" section scratched out, indicating a willingness to support Mc-

Carthy so long as it didn't cost money. A number of forms also indicated an intention to vote for McCarthy in the primary, but appended "please do not telephone me."

This sort of attitude totally befuddled McCarthy workers from the national staff, most of whom had never set foot in the Midwest before, much less in Nebraska. None of the traditional methods of campaigning evoked the normal responses. Veterans of the New Hampshire and Wisconsin enthusiasm found themselves, like fish out of water, in the nation's leading hotbed of apathy. Yet curiously, the same national campaign thinkers who had laid out McCarthy's unorthodox approach to politics attempted to attack the Nebraska problem through orthodox techniques, leading to a predictable and resounding failure.

Actually, it may be true that Nebraska was foredoomed by McCarthy's defeat in Indiana. Coming only a week before the Nebraska election, Indiana had exhausted the campaign's resources of both money and energy. None of the more experienced workers could be spared for Nebraska until the final week, and promises of financial help were repeatedly broken. It may seem strange that money would be promised, in definite amounts on definite dates, when there was absolutely no certainty that it could be delivered. But the McCarthy campaign has been like that from the beginning, leading to considerable consternation among local leaders (such as myself) who had gone in debt on the basis of such promises.

Besides the utter lack of financial resources—only \$2,000 had been sent to Nebraska before the final days of the campaign—we found ourselves totally understaffed, without significant outside assistance until the very last week of the primary campaign, when workers were freed from Indiana.

Strangely, these workers turned out to be almost entirely from New England, and they shared a near-total lack of comprehension of the Nebraska situation. An attempt was made to organize the working-class wards of South Omaha on the same basis as New Britain, Connecticut, with disastrous results. The same "organizer" managed to poison relations with a local Congressional candidate by getting involved in a dispute over a storefront office, meanwhile spending cash on thousands of McCarthy yard signs which blew away in Nebraska's strong spring winds.

Student organizers sent in to "take over" the local operation did just that, driving out the local students who had thought themselves in control. An entire cadre of hard-working high school students was ef-

fectively offended and sent home by the imported student leaders. Some joined the Kennedy camp, where they found that local people were treated in an even more high-handed fashion. The young people brought into Nebraska from past campaigns also adopted a working schedule which often called for sleeping until noon and doing most of their work between 10 p.m. and 4 a.m. Needless to say, such operative techniques are not particularly effective in a community which rolls up the sidewalks at 9 p.m.

Yet despite the many mistakes made in the Nebraska campaign (item: I was called at 7 a.m. one morning by a man who wanted to know what I planned to do with the rented airplane he had warming up on the runway—someone had forgotten he had rented it), a good deal of optimism continued to warm the hearts of the Nebraska crew.

McCarthy seemed like a natural in Nebraska, on paper. From nearby Minnesota, he had an outstanding record in most of the fields of traditional interest to the state: agriculture, economics, regional development, etc. It seemed difficult to imagine how Nebraska voters could prefer Robert Kennedy over Gene McCarthy, and we thought we had uncovered considerable anti-Kennedy feeling in the state.

We had. But it was confined largely to Republicans. And it should not have been forgotten that Nebraska's farmers are virtually 100% Republican. The state's Democrats are mainly in the Omaha-Lincoln metropolitan areas and are almost entirely working-class or lower-middleclass, largely uninformed, hawkish on the war and quietly racist, as well as intensely contemptuous of "intellectuals."

The primary campaign of 1968 revealed, in state after state, that McCarthy's support would come largely from middle-class segments of society, where education and economic security are major factors, and where support for the war is negligible. Nor did it seem likely to the casual observer that Robert Kennedy could reach the lower-class ethnic groups on both sides of the color barricade. But he could and did, for a variety of reasons, most of them involved with the Kennedy "mystique."

As a result of the historical process described above, Nebraska lacks the elements of the population which produced massive votes for McCarthy in other states. Curt Gans recognized the nature of the situation to some extent, and ordered an expensive advertising and canvassing campaign aimed at convincing Republicans to re-register as Democrats for the primary.

Predictably though unfortunately the cross-registration effort came

to little. I doubt if more than a few hundred Republicans re-registered in the entire state, though many of them expressed a preference for McCarthy and they did not have an exciting contest in their own party (Reagan did get a surprisingly large turnout as a non-candidate). For in Nebraska, Republicanism runs deep. There are still small towns and certain strata of society in larger towns where it is not socially acceptable to be anything but a Republican. It is unthinkable—an utterly foreign notion—for these people to register as Democrats, even for two weeks.

If my retrospective assessment of the situation in Nebraska is accurate, McCarthy probably did slightly better than anyone had a right to expect. He polled more than 20% of the vote in a three-way race against Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson. The fact that a fifth of the state's ordinarily highly-conservative Democrats cast their votes for the most unusual and perhaps the most radical candidate to present himself in a generation indicates a depth of restlessness and a desire for change that, transposed to the national level, becomes highly significant.

Though it would be totally irrational to assume that McCarthy might have found a way to win in Nebraska, I think that he might have done better with a more efficiently organized and financed campaign, even though I am not convinced that campaign organizations make much difference. It is a cliché that 90% of what one does in a campaign is irrelevant—the problem being that you never know which ten per cent is significant. In general, voters could not care less how brilliantly you think your campaign strategy is organized, or whether you have just the right personnel in the right slots. Rather, they react to the candidate and the image he projects. This of course involves advertising, but probably much more important is the manner in which the candidate comes across in newspaper articles and television news programs. The most arduous campaigner can never shake the hand of every voter, even in a very small state. He reaches more voters in a two-minute news broadcast than he can in a month of campaigning on foot.

Thus the breakdown of traditional organizational methods in the Nebraska McCarthy campaign had little impact. Since no one was watching, the public hardly missed it. But a series of foul-ups in scheduling and programming may have weakened a potentially helpful advertising program.

The first maneuver of McCarthy's national staff on landing in a new primary state has usually been to try to displace the local organization.

It happened in Wisconsin, it happened in Indiana and Nebraska, and when I got to Oregon I found the State Chairman wandering about aimlessly, wondering what was going on. But this displacement process may be endemic in political campaigns, and the Kennedy people had a reputation for being particularly abrupt and brutal about it. The national staff always considers that it knows better than the local crew. Sometimes it does.

However, the chief result of the chaos created in Nebraska, which featured an abrupt shift of the state office to Lincoln and a dispersal of authority to vague sources, was to leave scheduling in total wreckage. By the Sunday before the Nebraska vote, I found that several key men in the local TV industry had become so bewildered by incomprehensible schedule changes that they refused to believe anything handed out by the McCarthy organization. One station, tired of appearing at places where McCarthy did not, folded up its equipment and stomped out of a press conference vowing never to return.

Carefully cultivated relations with the printed press in Nebraska were shattered by the national staff in the last week. The local crew, particularly the State Chairman and myself, had outlined a series of appearances for the Senator aimed at maximum exposure in areas of population concentration. Eventually the imported staff wound up following essentially the same course, but only after so many revisions and so much rescheduling that the resulting exposure was far less than it might have been.

Of course no one can ever be certain about such things. But it is a fact that McCarthy got inferior exposure in Nebraska, and much of the press material turned out was the traditional political bombast already rejected by the candidate himself as useless. He has said repeatedly that his essential campaign technique has been to "walk around and let the people look at us." Perhaps if he had done just that, and kept his uncontrollable staff and its internal warfare out of the state, he might have done better.

Surveying the wreckage after the primary, I found that the office crews imported from New England had actually thrown out mail containing requests for information and some contributions, saying they had no time to open it. Rented Hertz cars were left in the Avis lot, incredible hotel bills were run up where inexpensive housing was available, and I spent at least a week tracking down lost cars. I never did find out just why that airplane was rented.

IV

Oregon was a very different story. While there, I could smell impending victory in the air. McCarthy actually drew larger crowds than Kennedy—that's the sort of state it is. In Oregon, the national staff was notable largely by its absence, as most had gone on to plunge into California's own interminable internal warfare. The Oregon campaign turned out to be the sort of quiet, sensible campaign I would have liked to see in Nebraska. But Oregon had a large and prosperous local McCarthy organization, something unthinkable in Nebraska, and a receptive population. Conditions were strikingly different.

In California, squabbles and internal dissension again prevailed. Since Northern Californians hate Southern Californians, and since the Los Angeles liberal Democrats have been fighting each other for years, the situation rapidly deteriorated into a chaos beyond the comprehension of the most astute veteran of political reporting. There has never been anything like the logic-defying madhouse set up in Westwood Village, where thousands of people wandered in and about at all hours, carting tremendous mountains of peanut butter sandwiches through a forest of telephone lines, plywood planks, and exhausted teenies asleep on tables. The fact that McCarthy did so well in California (though the extent of his performance was instantly forgotten in the national emotional catharsis of the next few days) is indicative of the axiom that campaign organizations, or at least their outward manifestations, are irrelevant to Presidential politics. Though McCarthy was unable to gain much support from the Negro and Mexican population of California (there are more Mexicans in Los Angeles than there are people in Nebraska), he almost won the election—meaning that he carried the white middleclass suburbs by landslide margins.

And therein lies the message and the portent of the McCarthy campaign. It is significant that some of the same people who are attracted to McCarthy might in other circumstances gravitate to George Wallace (many polls have indicated this). It is evident that a large segment of the most broadly representative elements of the population is looking for an alternative to the present system of politics in the country.

It is more than the war. Far more. It is more than the difficult state of the economy or the problems of the cities. What has happened is that much of America feels adrift in the politics of the 20th century. There is a despair that political activity as we have known it seems no

longer to be relevant to the world about us. The average citizen can find no way to affect the political process in which he is inextricably enmeshed.

McCarthy has brought these Americans a resurrection of confidence in the ability of the nation to respond in a rational fashion to the wishes of her people. He has shown that it is possible for people, instead of institutions and interest groups, to influence the course of events. He has re-humanized politics.

If I am not wrong, historians of the future will look back at the 20th century and note that its greatest problem was the loss of identity in an age of unbounded technological proliferation—the point in time when men began to have serious doubts that they were capable of controlling the society they had created. By reintroducing calm reason and personal courage, Gene McCarthy has given many of us a new lease on life, made it once again exciting to be an American.

And as McCarthy has so often pointed out, the national hunger for a new politics, a politics of decentralization and grass-roots democracy, is not his creation. He has come to symbolize the movement, but he did not invent it and he is not necessarily its leader. It is leaderless, in a sense, because it is so difficult to articulate.

Whether McCarthy is nominated for the Presidency or not, things will never be the same again. There are now thousands and thousands of Americans who have been to their first precinct caucus, their first state party convention. Many will be going to the national convention this year for the first time. Some have become officers in their local and state party structures. It is inconceivable that these thousands of participants in the "new politics" will fold their tents and go home after a setback. Such a rejuvenation of politics is still mystifying to the country's professional politicians, but they will soon come face to face with it in their own bailiwicks. I suspect we will not see many of them back at the 1972 national convention.

As I write, the polls continue to indicate an outpouring of grass-roots support for McCarthy throughout the country. Nothing like it has ever happened before. Willkie's nomination pales by comparison. The lesson is that the country is ready and anxious to try something new—to move in new directions and attempt to construct a place in the world that is consistent with our traditional notions of liberal democracy and the demands of today's world. This is a challenge to make America into what we have claimed it to be, and a challenge to the Democratic Party and the nation.