

Guns and butter Hubert

by Kenrick G. Kissell
 When Hubert H. Humphrey died earlier this month, virtually all commentators recognized that his passing was the passing of an era. Even before his election to the Senate almost 30 years ago, Humphrey had begun to play his role in American politics as one of the chief champions of the modern American warfare-welfare state.

Born in 1911 to the family of a small town druggist in South Dakota, Humphrey absorbed his liberalism from his father. Hubert Sr. was an active Democrat in a sea of rural Republicanism, but that didn't dampen his enthusiasm for Democratic party politics.

Humphrey entered the University of Minnesota in 1929, and after a decade of Depression-interrupted attendance graduated *magna cum laude* in 1939. He then went to Louisiana State University for a Master's degree. There he met the LSU student body president, Russell Long.

M.A. in hand Humphrey returned to a WPA job training adult education teachers in Duluth.

Returning to Minneapolis, Humphrey held several other WPA jobs during the early '40s, where he acquired contacts in the Minnesota labor movement that were to serve him well later on.

Tradition of agrarian radicalism.

Humphrey's personal career took place against a backdrop of the Midwest's tradition of agrarian radicalism. Minnesota experienced its share of support for Populism in the 1890s, but the state's first sustained left was the Non-Partisan League, formed in North Dakota in 1915 by ex-Socialist A. C. Townley.

The League's approach was to run candidates in the primaries of the state's dominant party, thereby capturing both the party and the state. The Minnesota NPLers followed that strategy until 1918, when suppression by the regular Republicans and defeat in the primary prompted them to form a Farmer-Labor Association and run a third ticket.

From that point on the main contest in Minnesota was between the Republicans and the Farmer-Laborites, with the Democrats a poor third.

By the mid-'30s the Communists were a major force within the FLP which grew in strength until it elected Floyd Olson governor in 1936.

Although in the early '30s there was some talk of establishing a national Farmer-Labor party, by 1936 the New Deal had stolen much of the Farmer-Laborites'

thunder.

In Minnesota, the FLP supported Roosevelt's re-election bid in return for the withdrawal of Democratic candidates for state office. This cooperation, which had been discussed throughout the '30s, accelerated after Floyd Olson died in August 1936.

The tendency toward Democrat-FLP cooperation was also facilitated by the Communists' Popular Front strategy, which put the issue of socialism on the back burner and gave unlimited support to Roosevelt and the war effort.

Declining Farmer-Labor fortunes.

When Olson died he was succeeded by Lt. Governor Hjalmar Petersen of the party's right wing. However, Elmer Benson of the CP-dominated left wing got the nod for the governor's seat in November 1936.

Two years later Petersen challenged Gov. Benson in a bloody, red-baiting primary contest. Benson won, but lost the general election to a resurgent GOP led by the then boy-wonder, Harold Stassen—who ran on the most progressive Republican platform seen in Minnesota before or since.

Benson's defeat was the final blow to FLP independence. Faced with declining electoral fortunes, cooptation by the New Deal, defection of its anti-Democrat faction to the Republicans, and strong Communist support for unification, top FLP officials began merger discussions with the Democrats in the early '40s.

Humphrey made his first try for public office in these circumstances when he ran for mayor of Minneapolis in 1943. He lost, but ran again and won in 1945—this time with the support of the newly-formed Democratic Farmer-Labor party (DFL).

Recent wire-service histories to the contrary, Humphrey had little to do with the creation of the DFL.

Purging the right.

In 1946, when the DFL held its first post-unification convention, the Farmer-Laborites dominated the proceedings—even the declining FLP was much bigger than the Democrats. Although the DFL state central committee elected at the convention was theoretically balanced between left and right, the balance of power was held by Orville Freeman and Eugenie Anderson, two "neutral" committee members who turned out to be heavily pro-Humphrey.

The right faction, led by Humphrey, thus managed to win control of the DFL hierarchy. But it still faced a strong left contingent, spear-headed by the Com-



As early as 1948 Humphrey (above with Sen. Edmund Muskie, a leading rival for presidential ambition) was chided about his political climbing act, prompting him to remark, "I thought lack of ambition was sinful and that a politician without it was ready for retirement."

munists.

With the Cold War heating up Communist presence in the DFL would have been an increasingly costly liability, and Humphrey and others decided that the left would have to be purged.

Between 1946 and 1948 Humphrey prepared for the ouster of the Farmer-Laborites from the DFL. In the meantime, the internal struggle heightened the independent presidential candidacy of Henry A. Wallace. The Communists had abandoned their Popular Front strategy of working within the Democratic party and had become the driving force behind the Wallace candidacy.

It appeared that the 1948 presidential race between Truman and Dewey would be extremely close—that a single state might make the difference. So the 1948 Minnesota DFL convention opened with the presidency itself hanging in the balance.

By all accounts, the 1948 DFL convention was one of the dirtiest in recent American history: the Humphrey-led right was determined to throw out the left and carry the state for Truman; the left aimed to use its strength to capture the convention and have the DFL endorse Wallace for president, thereby freezing Truman out of Minnesota.

Through their control of the state central committee, the right was able to block the seating of pro-Wallace delegates and read the Farmer-Laborites out of the party. The left then held a rump convention, endorsed Wallace, and went to the state Supreme Court claiming to be the true DFL. The court denied their petition. (After the defeat of the left candidates in the DFL primaries later that year, the left in Minnesota was as isolated as elsewhere in the U.S.)

National prominence.

At the Democratic national convention that year Humphrey burst onto the national political scene. The Republicans had already held their convention, and had produced a fairly progressive civil rights plank. Humphrey, believing that if the Dixiecrats exercised their traditional influence, "the Republicans might have seized the issue by default," led the effort to make the Democrats adopt the most progressive civil rights plank ever put forward by a major party in the U.S.

Coming back to Minnesota with his political clout enhanced by his performance at the national convention, and with the left purged, Humphrey won the DFL nomination for U.S. senator and went on to defeat the incumbent Republican

in November.

Within the context of Minnesota politics Humphrey represented the center-right. In the Senate, though, many at first considered him something of a "radical."

Humphrey, however, was never confused about his fundamental political sympathies: "While I have been called radical, socialist, sometimes Communist, accused of holding wild-eyed economic views, I have really never been anything other than an advocate of a pragmatic free enterprise."

New Deal enthusiasm.

Much of Humphrey's liberal reputation came from his enthusiasm for New Deal programs, that he felt were necessary "to protect the system from abuse." He had unbounded enthusiasm for any reform that benefitted organized labor or minorities and did not threaten the military budget.

Having already learned the benefits to be obtained from the Cold War, however, Humphrey opposed the repeal of the Smith Act (in contrast to his friends in the ADA). His worst anti-civil liberties move, though, came in 1954, when he sponsored the Communist Control Act, which made membership in the Communist party "an overt act aimed at overthrowing the federal government."

Just as Humphrey's response to red-baiting was to out-bait the red-baiters, so whenever Humphrey was accused of being "soft on defense," he responded by introducing bills to increase military spending. He was the preeminent "guns-and-butter" man.

Nonetheless, Humphrey's Senate record was one of the most productive of any senator. He drafted a plethora of liberal legislation (frequently in collaboration with his buddy in the Senate, Lyndon Johnson) that culminated in the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

As early as 1948 Humphrey was chided about his political climbing act, prompting him to remark defensively, "I thought lack of ambition was sinful and that a politician without it was ready for retirement." And Hubert was definitely not ready for retirement.

In 1960 he made his first bid for the presidency. But his imposing record of welfare state legislation, his chipmunk cheeks and garrulous enthusiasm couldn't compete with Jack Kennedy's dynamism, youthful looks and money. Only after JFK's assassination could Humphrey cash in on his longtime friendship with

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The closeness of the 1948 race between Truman (above with HHH and Eugene McCarthy) and Dewey was the excuse to purge the Farmer-Labor left.

ELECTIONS

Bella Abzug wins N.Y. nomination

by Carol Polsky

NEW YORK — Bella Abzug almost didn't make it, but the progressive ex-congresswoman from New York has won the Democratic nomination as a candidate for Congress. This was the one she had to win. After losing bids for a Senate seat and the New York City mayoralty, she risked the loser tag that turns credible contenders into perennial candidates.

That would have been particularly ironic in this case. If the State Supreme Court in Manhattan hadn't ruled in her favor, Abzug would have seen victory snatched by a technicality, by six green Bella ballots that should have been blue.

The ballots were among those cast at a raucous convention Jan. 15 by over 900 Democratic county committee members from the 18th Congressional District on Manhattan's East Side. The committee members gathered in a cavernous high school auditorium to nominate a candidate for a Feb. 14 special election called to fill the seat left vacant by New York City's new mayor Edward Koch.

The court ruling validating the six disputed Abzug ballots stripped former City Councilman Carter Burden of his own political comeback. He had been the announced winner—pending the court ruling. He's considering appeal.

Confusion runs wild.

Confusion at the nomination convention accounts for the mishap over the ballots. They were cast on the third round of voting after six of the original ten candidates had already withdrawn or been eliminated. The committee members had begun voting on green paper ballots (each round of voting took a different color, to prevent fraud) when two more candidates announced their withdrawal. That left only Abzug and Burden in the race. The convention chairman then directed the committee members to switch from green to blue ballots.

Amidst the noisy confusion, six Abzug supporters either didn't hear, or had already voted and left the auditorium. When the final vote was announced, it was 50.29 percent for Burden, 49.79 percent for Abzug. By that time, everyone knew about the green ballots, and the fight was on.

Shouts of "count the green ballots!" erupted from Abzug supporters in the crowded auditorium, but parliamentary moves to overturn their invalidation would have been uncertain, long and extremely tedious. So Abzug took it to court.

She was, of course, very pleased by the favorable court ruling and called it a "validation of the franchise." She promised a unified and strong campaign against the Republican candidate, S. William Green. Green was a regional director of the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development under Nixon.

Difficulty in winning.

While the green ballot snafu provided the most interesting, if bizarre, twist, another side of the story was Abzug's inability to produce a more solid and convincing win. She was considered the strongest of the ten generally liberal candidates, which included Allard Lowenstein, who has managed to keep himself visible in liberal causes and election attempts since being gerrymandered out of his Long Island congressional seat almost ten years ago.

Abzug came on strong in the first ballot, falling just short of 40 percent of the vote. Her nearest opponent, Burden, received 22.61 percent and Lowenstein drew 14.35 percent. Two candidates with less than 5 percent were eliminated.

On the second ballot, however, Abzug moved just ever so slightly upward, to 40.47 percent. Burden's tally rose to 28.80 percent. By the third ballot, with all other candidates gone, he jumped 21 points

Only a State Supreme Court ruling validating six ballots that had been cast on the wrong color gave Bella the Democratic nomination for New York's silk stocking West Side congressional area.

while Abzug was hard put to muster 10, even with the withdrawal of Lowenstein. Lowenstein's supporters, it was widely supposed, would go to Abzug, giving her the victory.

Probably enough of them did to make the difference, but they were clearly divided. She did not get the block of Lowenstein votes, nor was she the second choice of very many other committee members in that auditorium.

Abzug's difficulties were not so much ideological as personal. Manhattan politics are based on years of campaigns, handshakes, alliances, friendships, spats and rivalries. Bella's been in that world for a long time and as many people noted, "You either love her or you hate her." She has always had her committed and vocal supporters, but reaching beyond that has been problematic.

In addition, the 18th Congressional District, or most of it, is not Abzug's



home base. She doesn't even live there, and some committee members charged her with "carpetbagging." The district is, moreover, the stomping grounds of her political rival Ed Koch, the new mayor.

Between Koch and Abzug stand years of "bad blood." She lost the 18th to Koch in the mayoralty primary race and she lost it to Moynihan in the 1976 Senate primary. (She gave up her West Side congressional seat to run in that primary.)

Abzug is the favorite to win the Feb. 14 special election. Although the 18th is called the "silk stocking district," with some of the country's wealthiest neighborhoods, it also includes parts of the Lower East Side and increasing numbers of highrises containing moderately well-off young professionals. The changing demographics, plus the growing movement of the Democratic party away from Tammany Hall toward more respectable, middle class "reform" politics, accounts

for the high Democratic vote in the last decade. Before, John Lindsay was the kind of Republican the district elected to Congress.

A June or September primary will follow on the heels of the special election, with a regular election in November. Whoever has the incumbency has an advantage, but there will probably be a primary race. Allard Lowenstein, for one, has said he'd support the nominee in February but refuses to commit himself beyond that.

For now, and probably for later, abzug has her seat. Had she lost this nomination, she'd have been casting about for a new race to run in. But she was running out of races and running out of time. New York could well have lost one of its strongest and most progressive voices in politics.

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TRIALS

Dawson Five prosecution dropped

"This is a great day for the Dawson Five now that we are free. And all black people are now one step closer to being free."

With this jubilant statement, Dawson Five defendant J.D. Davenport greeted the news on Dec. 19 that county prosecutors had finally decided to abandon murder charges against him and four other black youths from rural Georgia. For the Five, the decision ended a two-year nightmare marked by illegal police tactics, confessions obtained at gunpoint and flagrant racism. (ITT, Aug. 3 and Aug. 24, 1977.)

The prosecution dropped the charges against the Five after a Georgia Superior Court judge ruled that the "confessions" obtained from the defendants were inadmissible in court because they had been extracted by means of intimidation and threats, backed up by cocked police pistols. The "confessions" were the mainstay of the prosecution's already feeble case against the Five.

The Dawson Five—Roosevelt Watson (17), Henderson Watson (21), James Edward Jackson Jr. (17), Johnny B. Jackson (18) and J.D. Davenport (18), were charged in the murder of a Dawson, Ga., man during an alleged grocery store robbery. From the outset, supporters have said the five were held on insufficient evidence.

In addition to the forced confessions, the prosecution relied on the testimony of the white owner of the grocery store where the murder took place. It was learned that the owner, Linward (Tiny) Denton, failed to call the police immediately after the shooting, and initially stated he could not identify any of the culprits.

It wasn't until five days later that he named Roosevelt Watson, whom he should have had little difficulty in recognizing since he was a regular customer at



the store. When the four other youths contended that Watson was several miles away at the time of the shooting, they too were arrested.

More than discrepancies marred the case. In his statement on suppressing the confessions Superior Court Judge Walter Geer said that the statements "were not freely, voluntarily and intelligently made."

He also announced the administration of a lie-detector test to Roosevelt Watson in Americus, Ga., "in an environment strange to the defendant." Watson "confessed" only after he was threatened with electrocution and castration, and forced to search for the alleged murder weapon—which was never found—in an icy pond for several hours. The other defendants also "confessed" after being interrogated at pistol point.

The forced confession charges against the police were corroborated by William Rucker, a former Dawson police inspector, who testified that he was present when a deputy questioned one of the de-

fendants, Junior Jackson, with a pistol cocked at Jackson's head.

The Dawson case revealed numerous instances of harassment and discrimination against blacks in Georgia. Millard Farmer, defense attorney for the Five and a staff member of Team Defense, a legal defense project that focuses its work on prisoners threatened with the death penalty, disclosed the gross underrepresentation of blacks in the jury pool in Terrell County. He found that the jury pool was 26 percent black, although blacks make up 65 percent of the county's population.

William Rucker, the former police inspector who confirmed the torture charges against the police, described under oath the pattern of illegal activities aimed at repressing black people in Dawson. This harassment included keeping lists of all blacks—but no whites—who buy guns, intimidating some blacks who tried to register to vote and setting high bails for imprisoned blacks.

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