

Liberals on way out of Republican Party



David S. Broder

NEW HAVEN—Here in Connecticut, where Sen. Lowell P. Weicker, Jr. came close to running for reelection this fall as an independent rather than remaining a Republican, there are many other Republicans who share his qualms about the future in the GOP.

One of them—an official who, like Weicker, has decided to stand pat for the remainder of the term—remarked the other day on what had happened to the liberal Republicans at the Kansas City convention.

"We've lost ground steadily since 1972," he said, "but this time they've ignored us."

losing—on the party rules. And this year, they were all but invisible on the floor in either nomination, platform or rules battles.

Rockefeller was being dumped from the ticket. He was handed extra humiliation when he was assigned to accept, on behalf of the Ford administration, the conservative platform amendment designed as a rebuke to his protégé, Secretary of State Kissinger.

The former New York governor is almost too convenient a symbol of the increasing impotence of the Republican progressives. In 1968, he was a presidential candidate. By 1972 he had been reduced to nominating Richard Nixon for President. This year, his assignment was to nominate Bob Dole for Vice President. Lord only knows what he'll be handed if he comes back four years from now.

Rockefeller does symbolize one cause of the liberal Republicans' decline—senescence. Like Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, Clifford Case of New Jersey and Edward Brooke of Massachusetts, he has grown weary of the fray and just doesn't care that much what happens to his party.

Other liberal Republicans, who do care very much, make themselves ineffectual by doing something no serious politician should ever do—giving their help for free.

Sen. Charles McC. Mathias of Maryland is one of those conscientious progressives. He complained on television the other day that Presi-

dent Ford was ignoring the very people whose help was essential in making him the nominee—the liberal Republicans.

Mathias is right, but he doesn't carry his argument far enough. Last December he was weighing the possibility of becoming the third candidate for the Republican presidential nomination. But Mathias ruled himself out, on the grounds that his candidacy could only hurt Mr. Ford's chances of beating Ronald Reagan.

By that decision, he guaranteed that the only effective pressure on the President, through the moment of his nomination, would be the pressure from the right. Had Mathias run, and won a share of the delegates from Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, Oregon and other liberal Republican states, then the progressives would have had the same kind of bargaining power at the convention that Clarke Reed of Mississippi enjoyed by withholding votes from the conservative side.

Mr. Ford would have blown out of the race right at the start, in New Hampshire, had not such liberal local Republicans as Walter Peterson, Robert Reno and Victoria Zachos, aided by such outside campaigners as liberal Reps. Paul McCloskey and William Cohen, belatedly mobilized the moderate Republicans of that state—who had no great enthusiasm for the President—to rescue him from defeat at Reagan's hands.

Mr. Ford would have been a sure loser again had not ex-Gov. Richard Ogilvie and Sen. Charles H. Percy organized Illinois for him. If Gov. William Milliken had not stepped in to save Michigan when the President was reeling from his defeats in Texas and Indiana, Mr. Ford would not be planning a campaign this week.

All of these rescue missions were led by liberal Republicans. But they got nothing in return, not even a voice in the vice-presidential choice,

because they never asked.

If Mr. Ford is elected, they may have a chance to recoup. The President will continue to fill his cabinet with liberal Republicans; they represent the real talent pool in his party. One of them, perhaps, can be in a position to compete for the presidency in 1980.

But if Mr. Ford loses, the conservatives very likely have the votes to complete their take-over of the party organization by electing one of their own to succeed Mary Louise Smith as Republican National

Chairman.

Then the progressive Republicans would face real exclusion—and a tough choice whether it makes more sense to remain in the GOP or take the independent route that both Weicker and Mathias have come close to choosing.

Mathias said on "Meet the Press" that, "If we lose...the Republican Party may be at a point of transition." And that transition could point to the exit sign for men like himself, so little do they have left to lose inside the GOP.

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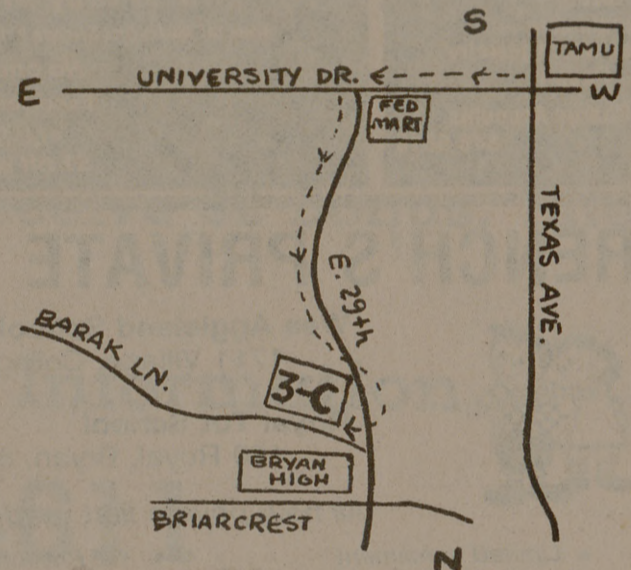
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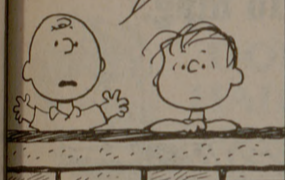
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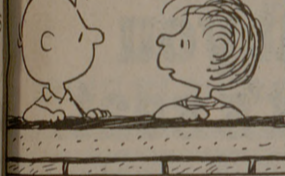
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