

## Elephants and Donkeys by Stephen Pepper

### Bush won't wash in 1988 race

Both major parties are committed to putting up candidates for the 1988 presidential election, but beyond that commitment, nothing much more can be said about who these candidates may be, and what, if anything, they will stand for. Not since 1960 has the presidential race been so wide open, and beyond the uncertainties of political fortune there lies a political vacuum that well may persist until the election year. As one campaign professional, Lee Atwater, remarked, the potential winning candidate, may not yet be on the charts.

The cause of this political vacuum is the gulf between the reality of the United States today, mired in a depression, while boasting about a recovery, and the distorted image of reality reflected in the political rhetoric. Only the very rare political leader can overcome this discrepancy. The immense popularity of President Reagan, is in part due to the fact that his genuinely likable qualities, his real virtues, allow him to escape the task of forcing the American people to face the present crisis. As long as he is there, they reason, they won't have to deal with reality.

This popularity and mantle of leadership cannot be passed on to just anyone, least of all to George Bush. It should be recalled that in 1960, the political year comparable to the present one, Nixon lost the election, not because of the TV debate with Kennedy, and not even because of vote fraud in Chicago, but because of the lukewarm relationship that President

Eisenhower maintained toward him throughout the campaign. Reagan may very well adopt the same attitude.

In these circumstances, Bush would be in deep trouble. And now, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, a new candidate appears ready to announce soon after the November elections: Donald Rumsfeld. The Sunday magazine section of the *Chicago Tribune* (Jan. 26) carries a long cover story on the former Secretary of Defense: "For more than a decade the Illinois Republican has been developing strategies and enlisting political allies to help him claim the nation's highest office. . . . Now Donald Rumsfeld thinks that 1988 could be his year."

Rumsfeld challenges George Bush's hold on the center of the Republican Party in a way that Jack Kemp will never be able to do. His positions on defense, and on a hard line toward the Soviets, have a natural appeal to conservatives, while Bush will always appear to them as an "oligarch going slumming." When Lyndon LaRouche was able to pin the label of Yale's Skull and Bones Society on Bush in New Hampshire, it finished him politically.

### Chaos reigns in Democratic camp

On the Democratic side, the situation is every bit as chaotic. Only one thing stands out: No one left alive wants the label of Carter-Mondale Democrat. Democrats being how they are, it took not one but two national trouncings to get that point across. One of their bright young men, Governor Robb of Virginia, put it this way on national television: "We should thank them [the Mondalites] for laboring in the vineyard, but we don't need to defend their record."

Another truth uttered about today's party was spoken by columnist David Broder: "The Democrats lack only three things: money, ideas, and leaders."

They don't lack candidates, however. The press has discovered all kinds of "fresh faces": Rep. Gephardt of Missouri, Sen. Biden of Delaware, Gov. Robb, Gov. Babbitt of Arizona, Sen. Hart of Colorado—the original from which all the clones have been made—and, of course, Mario the-mafia-doesn't-exist Cuomo of New York. This situation also resembles the 1976 campaign when the Establishment lined up a gaggle of competitors and rigged a selection process to arrive at the candidate they had chosen in advance, Jimmy Carter. Only this time, they don't know who they want yet.

In these circumstances the already announced candidacy of Lyndon LaRouche takes on a special significance. He has just given a very hard-hitting assessment of the desperate economic situation, but it is too soon to tell whether the American people are sufficiently aroused to carry him to victory. But since in the past, LaRouche's Democratic and Republican supporters alike have tended to support Reagan as the "big" candidate, the fact that Reagan will longer be running is definitely a factor in his favor.

Never has the political environment in this country been more fluid. The conditions that will likely shape the outcome of 1988 will be set in motion in 1986. If the effects of Gramm-Rudman-Hollings work against incumbents, as Congressman Panetta of California has predicted, and the falling oil prices cause a blowout throughout the Southwest, then the current outsiders will benefit. These odds may favor both Rumsfeld and LaRouche.