

The Presidential Election 1968 OR 'This Is the Year That Is'

By **MIKE FANCHER**
Of the Emerald

Why is Lyndon Johnson doing what he is doing?

Why, in a time when more and more people are speaking out against the present course of action in Vietnam does Lyndon Johnson think he is pursuing the right path?

Why, in a time of drastic social unrest is the president who fought so hard in his first year of office for social reform legislation letting the butter he produced be hardened and cast into guns.

Why, in a time when there are two third parties, numerous Republican contenders, and even staunch opposition in the Democratic ranks does Lyndon Johnson think he will be re-elected?

These are questions many Americans will ask between now and November.

Maybe only Lyndon Johnson himself can answer these questions. Then again, maybe even he can't provide the answers. But one possible explanation can be found in Johnson's own description of his political philosophy.

In his book "A Time For Action," written in 1964, the President set down the first two basic tenets of his philosophy in this way:

"First I believe every American has something to say and, under our system, a right to an audience.

"Second, I believe there is always a national answer to each national problem, and, believing this, I do not believe there are necessarily two sides to every question."

Johnson later enlarges on the concept of the national answer saying it is one which all reasonable men can agree upon even though this may take many years.

Possibly Lyndon Johnson thinks he is working toward that national answer. Such an explanation seems to fit the picture.

First, Johnson's course in Vietnam has in the past largely resembled a tightrope act—with the hawks on one side and the doves on the other. The picture is complete with Ho Chi Minh holding out, waiting to see if Johnson will tumble.

Ho's bet is that the doves will sway the rope enough to dump LBJ. The statistics backing his point could well be the anti-war tone present in the U.S. today.

On the other hand, LBJ has matched the bet with growing military pressure. His bet is Ho can be bombed to the conference table. The statistics backing Johnson's point are probably the record the U.S. has had of backing defense spending and America's fear of spreading Communism.

Second, due to such a course in Vietnam, Johnson has been forced to change priorities and snub social reform. He only has so much money and he has found out that guns cost more than he thought they would.

Third, if Johnson believes he is really making headway toward the national answer, then he probably believes he can maintain enough compromise votes and ballots from Americans who just aren't sure about the war to win in November.

The problems are these:

First, Johnson isn't receiving static just from the doves. There is a strong minority of hawks making demands just as there is a strong minority of doves. There also is a majority of unsatisfied voters who want to win or get out. Proof that such a tightrope course as the present one is untenable is evidenced by McNamara's ouster.

Second, social unrest, not Vietnam, could well be the most decisive issues in the coming elections. Unfortunately most of the American people will be most concerned with prevention rather than prescription—it's easier to close your eyes to a social problem by putting your thumb down on its symptoms than it is to open your eyes to the problem and tackle causes not symptoms.

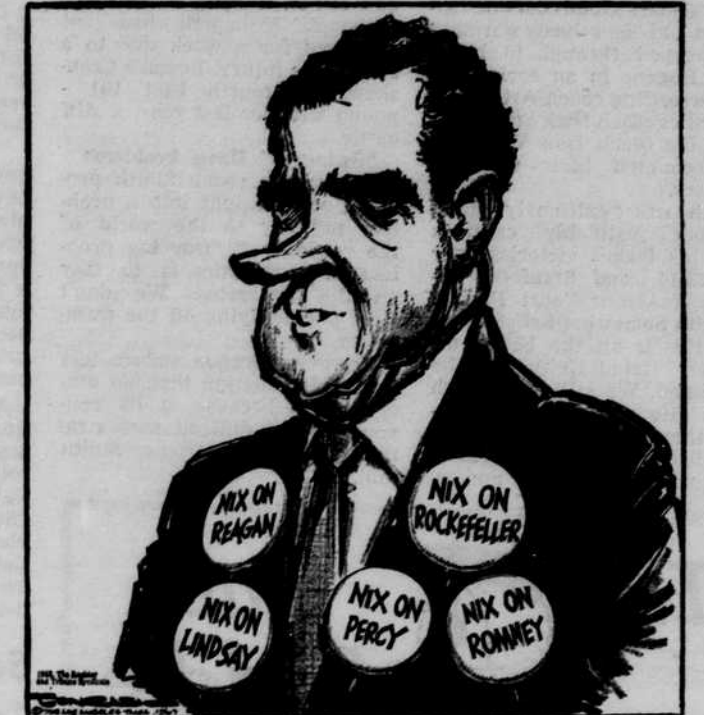
Third, Johnson may not be providing a national answer and may not be able to by November. Instead of a solution all reasonable men can agree upon, the President may be working toward something no reasonable men will accept.

How well Johnson can handle these problems. How well his opponents (whoever they may ultimately be) can use the problems against him. And, whether each voter answers for himself the questions, "Why is Lyndon Johnson doing what he is doing?" will combine to tell the tale of Presidential Election 1968.

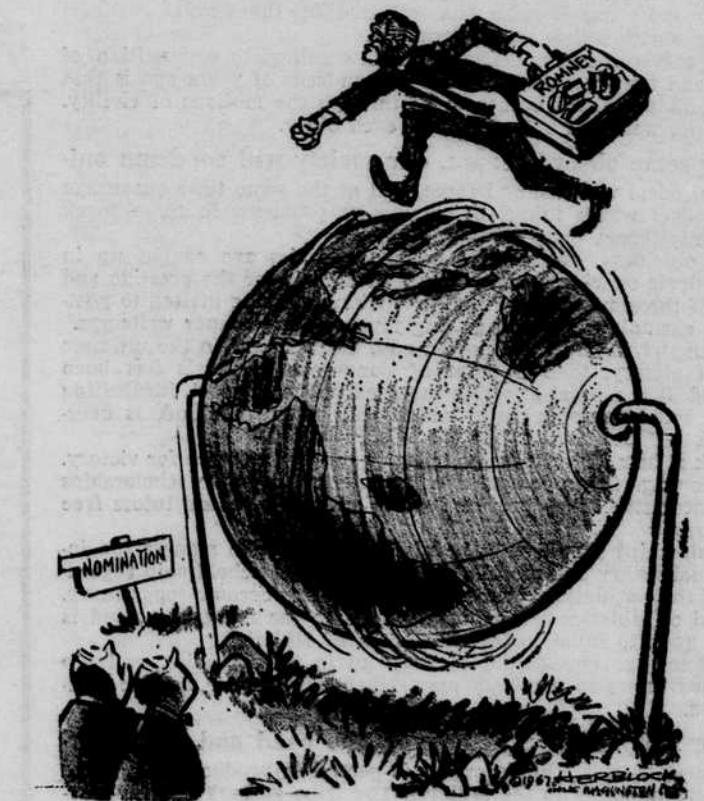


"Gene McCarthy could split this party right down the middle!"

"I'm Afraid To Look"



"Never Saw A Guy Do So Much Traveling Without Seeming To Get Anywhere"



"Wouldn't you think the war on poverty and the war in Vietnam would be enough . . . ?"

Jules Feiffer

