

An Early Hallowe'en in Big D

Dallas

When Ambassador Stevenson arrived in Dallas Oct. 24, he was asked by a reporter if he expected a friendly crowd at his speech that night. He said, "I don't know why not." That night at his UN Day speech he faced the radical right of Dallas.

Nearly 2,000 Dallas citizens who came to hear Stevenson out of curiosity, admiration, or respect for a representative of the United States government also faced the radical right of Dallas. They saw a mob made of individuals out of the wildest dreams of Charles Addams or Popsy Hunt. They saw a nadir of courtesy, decency, and civilized behavior.

This night of shame for Dallas, with its spitting, booing, and placard-hitting, has been documented in the newspapers and other media. I, as an ordinary Dallas citizen, would like to give some personal impressions to try to capture for others some idea of what it is like to be part of a mob of people sick in mind and soul.

The evening started normally enough (for Dallas). The picketers out front carrying their messages of "UN, Red Front" and such were mostly ordinary-looking people, many of them teen-agers. They did wear the grim faces one often sees on people who want to impeach Earl Warren. A variety of printed matter was passed out. Some of it was rightist; one was a modest card from Pepper Garcia, Democrat running in the up-coming special election.

Inside the auditorium the crowd was interspersed with small groups carrying toy American flags and aisle-paraders with toy American and Confederate flags.

After the program started, it was obvious that another well-planned program was being set in motion. Its ingredients were booing, coughing, laughing, jangling of charm bracelets with tiny bells, the yelling of insults, and clicking Hallowe'en noise-makers. About half-way through Stevenson's speech the Dramatic Exits started; one by one they paraded up the aisle with loud, muttered comments.

The Stevenson supporters, who were in the large majority, countered with applause for him that surely must have been heard in Tarrant County. They applauded everyone on the stage wildly and gave Stevenson several standing ovations. When Frank McGehee, leader of Indignation Conventions, stood up at the start of Stevenson's speech and tried to disrupt the proceedings, he was in turn disrupted by boos, yells, and a small, elderly man who tried to push the much heavier McGehee back in his seat.

Before the program ended the group was divided into Friends and Enemies. Friends included not only Stevenson's personal admirers, but also many who disagree with his ideas but are horrified by hatred and execrable manners. Many of the female members of the audience, including me, were torn between fury and fear. Everyone was excited, angry, half or all the way scared, and many were spoiling for a fight as the group left the auditorium to be faced by Friends, Enemies, a Bircher pep rally, and a group of Cuban refugees apparently recruiting for an invasion of Castro.

Here are some representative faces and voices in the crowd:

Bobby Joiner, Grand Prairie racist, wore an Uncle Sam costume with red, white, and blue festooning almost every part of his person.

A man hollered, "Aren't you fellows celebrating Hallowe'en a bit early?"

A man in the grip of religious mania kept screaming, "Kennedy will get his reward in Hell. Stevenson is going to die. His heart will stop, stop, stop. And he will burn, burn, burn."

A man in a clerical collar, one of the few

on either side whose faces by now weren't distorted by fury, was patiently saying over and over, "There's no excuse for bad manners."

"Stevenson, that traitor, he makes me sick."

"You look it."

"What about Cuber?"

"This must be what it was like in Munich during the Beer Hall *Putsch*."

This is what it was like Oct. 24, 1963 in Dallas, Texas. The poise and personal dignity of Adlai Stevenson throughout were amazing. Equally astonishing were the large numbers of Dallasites who attended and rallied to his support.

The biggest shock was the naked faces of hate. If the Birchers had not been in the minority, the Stevenson Riot would have had blood as well as spit. Once seen, a mob is not easily forgotten. No words can properly describe the shame, the alarm, and the ugliness one feels. Let us not cease to laugh at the radical right, for the sense of humor these people have lost is one of their greatest shortcomings. But let us not delude ourselves that they are harmless, letter-writing cranks. In Dallas, at least, they are well-organized, well-financed, well-led, dedicated, and dangerous. They, as well as the Communists, are enemies to democracy. D.E.S.

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