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BOWLES VS. BOWLES

There were possible assists in the play by which Chester Bowles was thrown out at the plate, so far as the senatorial nomination was concerned.

One of these has been falsely assigned, by some scorers, to Bill Benton, who once owed a seat in the Senate to Bowles. The theory, said to have reached some degree of emotional intensity among some Bowles men during the convention itself, was that Benton could have helped Bowles, and refused to, by withdrawing himself from the three-cornered race. Since drowning men will clutch at anything it may be that the Bowles camp, nomination morning thought that any Benton delegates released would float their way. If so, they couldn't have been more in error. Benton happened to have collected a bloc of delegates who didn't particularly want to go to Dodd, but who had found Bowles unacceptable as an alternate. Released, they would have gone to Dodd, as the lesser of two unwanted choices, by about three to one. Benton was doing Bowles the most good he could do him by staying in the race.

If there are to be any assists credited in the play which found Bowles out at home plate, they have to go not to Benton, but to Bowles himself, or, more precisely, to that internal huckster heritage he cannot seem to shake.

From the moment the convention opened the ears of the delegates were being assaulted by a Bowles sound truck, specializing in an attempted jingle about things like “full employment,” as if delegates were somehow interested in that.

This was merely the spearhead of a campaign designed to give the delegates the full saturation treatment from every conceivable angle.

Under the huckster technique, it was undoubtedly considered excellent planning to have the chief nominating speech for Bowles made by the individual who had the highest TV rating of all residents of Connecticut. The expected audience impact dimmed, a bit, when the TV celebrity gave a halting performance, capped by an ill-fated attribution to FDR of one of the most famous colloquialisms of Al Smith.

What next? What was next but a lady politician, posing as the proverbial Bowles housewife who has trouble making ends meet in this perpetual era of high prices?

And next? There was, next, the most amazing touch of all, in which a seconding speech was devoted to the theme that Bowles was the man to choose, if faithful party workers wanted to be sure of their proper share of the patronage pie.

This was apparently based on a motivational research study which had apparently reported that ordinary delegates thought Dodd more their kind of politician than Bowles. But instead of glorying in this possibility, and choosing to make the point that the convention should select a candidate who was above pure patronage policies, the Bowles seconder proudly and eagerly carried the Bowles banner down into the cheap partisan muck, asking the delegates to vote for him not to save the world, but to increase their own chance of getting political jobs.

Thus one last gap in the perfect saturation appeal was plugged, and the last possible, and lowest common, motivation was appealed to.

The irony in all this is that, underneath, Chester Bowles is a fine, genuine article whose natural appeal, however, has to keep fighting its way through huckster contrivances designed to create the chart-perfect candidate.