**Nixon Sets the Trap, by “Victorson.” *the liberal democrat*, June 1962.**

*“Victorson” was the pseudonym of Mike Miller.*

As I see it, Nixon strategists, worried by Pat Brown’s steady rise in the popularity polls, have devised a plan which they feel will place the Democrats on the defensive from June to November. The plan is simple, has a history of success, and appears still to be powerful. It works in three stages, and the first is already underway.

In the remainder of this month, May, there will be a serious effort to create for Nixon the image of a man who is responsible, competent, and neither an extremist of the right nor of the left. Indicative of this image-building campaign are (1) Nixon’s opposition to the initiative petition, sponsored by Assemblyman Francis, which would amend the state Constitution to outlaw the Communist Party and, in the process, deny many civil liberties to any suspected subversive, and (2) his speech on May 4 at the University of California in which he explicitly attacked the “reactionaries” on the left and the right.

Behind this campaign is the decision by Nixon forces that not only will they beat Joe Shell, the ultra-conservative, in the primary but that the money and support behind Shell will shift to Nixon after the primary. Whether an actual deal exists between Nixon and Shell remains uncertain. Shell’s recent interview in the Young Republican convention in which he restrained some of his exuberant supporters from their anti-Nixon antics indicates that an agreement between the two Republican contenders may have been reached. Given these assumptions about the primary and the Shell supporters, it makes sense that Nixon’s appeal is directed toward the middle voters, now uncommitted, whom he must swing to his support if he is to win in November.

Stage 2 of the master plan goes into operation close before the primaries. At this time, in a new guise, the same tactic that was used by Nixon forces in the campaigns against Jerry Voorhis for the House and Helen Gahagan Douglas for the Senate will be used again. The opening of Stage 2 will be associated with the release of the report of the hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities held in Los Angeles at the end of April. Subcommittee chairman Clyde Doyle, Los Angeles conservative Democrat, has promised the report by the end of May. Nixon, having in Stage 1 of the campaign dissociated himself from “reactionaries” of the right who might be within his own party, will demand of Pat Brown that he do the same in respect to those in his party who oppose HUAC or nuclear bomb testing, and this includes a good number of candidates for state and national office as well as some of the most vigorous Democratic club workers and leaders. In making this demand, Nixon will point to the fact that active Democrats who have taken such stands still have leadership roles in the Democratic Party. By directing his demand at Pat Brown, Nixon is hoping to break whatever unity now remains between liberals and moderates in the Democratic party. Perhaps Nixon, but more likely people around him, will charge “infiltration” of the Democratic camp by extreme leftists. If this appears too risky to do, they will rely upon the opposition to the HUAC report that is almost certain to emerge from elements in the Democratic party.

One way being considered by Nixon tacticians to move into Stage 2 would involve accepting the challenge to conservatives from the Americans for Democratic Action Convention. (It would also drive a wedge between liberals.) At their convention, ADA delegates adopted a resolution urging conservatives to show the same vigor in opposing extremists of the right as they, the ADA, have shown in opposing those of the left. By June, Nixon will be able to claim that he has done what the ADA urged. He may make the claim to lead into his demand that the Democratic Party clean itself of its extremists of the left.

Stage 3 of the Nixon strategy assumes a certain response from Brown which will straddle the issue and avoid any clear-cut position in support of the liberals. Nixon further expects the inclusion in Brown’s reply of what by now is national Democratic Party line – a statement that attacks the extremes of the left and the right. The problem in using this response at this point in time will be that Nixon is in the process of pre-empting the field. He will claim, and with some justification, given the assumption that the two extremes are (1) being for the Francis amendment and (2) being against HUAC, that he is the moderate and that Brown, for all his verbal attacks on the two extremes, has not specifically condemned those in his party who oppose testing and has neither come out in support of HUAC nor condemned those who oppose it. Nixon is aware of the fact, supported by several sociological studies as well as by the pollsters, that activists in the Democratic Party tend to be more liberal than the middle group the Party seeks to mobilize in the general election. Nixon believes that he cannot lose the election if Brown responds in the way he expects, the way Brown has responded to similar challenges in the past. And if Brown does fail to back up the liberals in the preprimary period, and if none of them make it through the primaries, it is likely that many of the best Democratic Party workers will stay home after June, giving only electoral support, if that, to the Democrats in November. On the other hand, should some of the liberals – John O’Connell, George Brown, Jerry Pacht, Bill Stanton, Willie Brown, etc. – emerge as primary victors, they will serve as targets for Nixon forces, united after the primary, during the rest of the campaign.

The genius of Nixon’s strategy is that it will steal the Democratic initiative against the far right by acting on its challenge and by demanding similar activity on the part of the Democrats against the left. When President Kennedy decided that the far right was more the headache of the Republican Party than of the Democrats, he did not anticipate the fact that Nixon can appear the moderate when contrasted with Shell, the Birchers, and the rest of the lunatic fringe on the right. While the growth of the right may initially have aided liberals by causing confusion in the Republican camp and by causing a spurt of anti-right-wing activity, this has not been the longer-range effect of the right. Quite the contrary, it is shifting the whole political dialog toward its extreme on the spectrum. The further to the right the extremists go, the further to the right on the spectrum is the “middle” position. For Nixon, already on the right, this is an asset. For Brown, the Kennedy Administration, and most Democrats, this is a liability because it will be increasingly difficult for them to claim to be the magic “middle” without giving up what is really at stake, their program for increased social welfare, civil rights, civil liberties and economic progress. The most conservative Democrats are the ones who will benefit by the shift in the limits of the political spectrum, the ones who vote against the Governor’s program in Sacramento, and with Dixiecrats and Republicans in Washington. Indeed, these conservative Democrats may themselves be tempted to demand that their liberal primary opponents – where contests exist – disavow and castigate their “left-wing” supporters.

For Pat Brown, a man who hates making decisions, one alternative seems to remain. It is the one that Nixon and his strategists do not expect Brown to choose. If followed, it is most likely to give Brown the advantage in the political battle for California. It would have these ingredients: first, an immediate attack on HUAC in California, both for its tactics, in timing its hearings with the elections, and on principle, for its undermining of democratic traditions. Brown can cry dirty politics and claim that the Committee, like its private equivalents on the far right, only stirs up suspicion and hostility in the community while contributing nothing to the democratic political process. At the same time, Brown can make a hard-hitting attack against those who use anti-Communism to hide their opposition to measures favoring civil rights, social welfare, civil liberties, labor, and new approaches to the solution of the Cold War. These are the meat of the election, and Brown has to make that clear if he, his program, and his fellow Democrats are to win in November. Focusing on these issues, while at the same time defending civil liberties for all political views, is the key to success for Brown and his program.

In doing this, moreover, Brown will be shifting his target from the “middle” voter to the natural Democratic voter who is either unregistered or who frequently fails to come to the polls. In the 1958 election, with a “right to work” initiative on the ballot, the Democrats and labor turned out one base of support, the organized worker. In the absence of such a ready-made campaign issue, Brown is going to have to make it abundantly clear that the underlying issues remain the same. The drive to register farm workers should be strengthened, and emphasis on Brown’s civil-rights program should be heavy. The same kind of strategy needs to be followed with regard to the aged and other key voting groups which form a natural base for liberal legislation. The Democrats are, with little doubt, the majority party in California. At the same time, their electorate is more difficult to mobilize. A vigorous campaign on the issues, forcing Nixon and the Republicans to state their position on such things as state FEPC, planning for the re-training and economic conversion necessitated by automation, publicly supported housing, and similar issues, is the key to a Democratic victory, a victory which will keep Brown’s program intact and which will shift the political dialog away from the question of where one falls on an ever-rightward-shifting spectrum to one’s stands on the major issues of the day.

The question for Brown remains: will he and his advisers see their way clear to follow such a strategy, or will a combination of internal conservatism in the Democratic party and the growing pressures from the right force him in to the Nixon trap and lead to the demise of, at the very least, his political program, and perhaps, his personal career.