

Inside Report . . . By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

The White Man's Party

DENVER — There was a self-conscious lack of support, either private or public, for Negro rights at the meeting of the Republican National Committee here last week. And for good reason.

Far from desiring to outdo Democrats as crusaders for racial equality, substantial numbers of Party leaders from both North and South see rich political dividends flowing from the Negrophobia of many white Americans. These Republicans want to unmistakably establish the Party of Lincoln as the white man's party.

Obviously, this is not the kind of political theory suitable for shouting to the world. Nevertheless, there were tell-tale signs of it at the Party conclave here.

The National Committee's only official utterance on the racial crisis was a resolution which couldn't offend the more defiant segregationists (it simply condemned the Kennedy Administration for "its failure to deal effectively with the problems of civil rights and to foster an atmosphere of understanding and good will in which racial conflict can be resolved"). Polemics by Republican orators shied away from the Nation's top domestic problem. Even the closed sessions of Party officials skirted the Negro question.

BEYOND these clues, a proposed new political strategy for the Party was obliquely suggested in private chats here. It is a strategy based on three assumptions now widely accepted by Republican leaders.

Assumption No. 1: The Negro is inextricably linked to the Democratic Party. Because of the low-income Negro's natural affinity for Democratic welfare programs, he sometimes will vote even for Democrats who are out-and-out segregationists. To assume then that a stronger Republican civil rights stance will capture the Negro vote is political rainbow-chasing.

Assumption No. 2: Because of his support for the Negro movement, President Kennedy is in serious trouble in the South.

Assumption No. 3: The spread of Negro demonstrations to the North has stirred

concern — even fear—among Northern whites, including many Democrats. The white construction worker sees lowering the color bar in his Jim Crow union as a threat to his job. The lower middle class suburbanite, who has invested much of his savings in his home, sees the Negro who wants to live next door to him as a financial threat.

Based on these assumptions, the Party policy on Negro rights should be ambiguous and cautious in an effort to woo the white vote. Outright avowal of segregation is not under consideration. But Republicans can legitimately base opposition to Negro demonstrations and to tough new legislation on established Republican principles of law-and-order, states' rights and limited government. This strategy is tailor-made for Sen. Barry Goldwater, no segregationist but the most popular politician in the South today, as presidential candidate.

ALL THIS is more than speculation. "I'm very much afraid," forecast an antisegregation Republican, "That we're well on the road to becoming the white supremacy party, and there's no turning back."

Such talk last week made many a Republican sick at heart. But their pleas not to write off the Negro vote are ignored. In the words of one veteran Republican attending the meeting here: "You have to remember this isn't South Africa. The whites outnumber the Negroes 9 to 1."

Over some cold bottles of beer the other afternoon, however, two skilled Republican professionals — each a conservative and neither a civil rights zealot—developed this impressive argument against a lily-white Republican Party:

Not only is segregation doomed, but it also is inevitable that Negroes will eventually break through the bonds of poverty. They then might be naturally attracted to the Republican Party along with millions of other middle-in-

come Americans—but not if the Republicans had by then become labeled as the white man's party.

Thus, Republicans face the danger next year of sacrificing the future for a highly speculative present.

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