Kennedy Faces Congress Fight After ‘Victory’

BY EUGENE KEILIN
(Second of two parts)

While it is still far too early to predict the long-range consequences of the November elections, certain facts have been clear almost from the moment the great electronic computers began to grind out their party predictions on election night.

In the first place, neither party can be said to have been given any sort of mandate from the people. That the Democrats failed to suffer the normal mid-term attrition can be considered, so far as party politics are concerned, as little more than a moral victory.

THE 88TH congress will be nearly as obstinate as the 87th and the President’s legislative leaders will be just as hard up for a working majority. Parity was achieved in the nation’s state houses, but only at the expense of a costly trade in which the Democrats took some of the small ones from the Republicans in exchange for which the GOP walked off with some of the electorally more potent.

ON THE other hand, the Republicans didn’t get the call, either, and their failure is not so much a result of New Frontier popularity as it is of their own lack of exhibited philosophy. There are those who claim that Richard Nixon’s defeat both for the Presidency and the California governor’s chair, are largely the result of his inability to formulate and advance a set of consistent principles. If this is so, his failure is his party’s failure.

THERE ARE some signs among recent national committee press releases that the GOP is finally waking up to its deficiencies, but the awakening may prove too late and too late to have a major effect on 1964.

It is important that practically the only issue of national significance which the GOP could raise was the question of Cuba. Whatever its motivation, the President’s late-October firmness toward the island fortress knocked most of the wind out of GOP sails. Besides, there were many who were beginning to remember that it was candidate Kennedy and not candidate Nixon who advocated the so-called hard line toward Cuba in the first place.

THE SECOND major lesson is that neither the South nor the New England Northeast will long remain solid. This is particularly true in the South, and its effects will go far beyond the practical politics of an election to the real business of running a government. Eisenhower successes in ’52 and ’56 and big Nixon totals in ’60 were no flukes, so far as the South is concerned. When second-party candidates begin winning a few state and local elections and piling up impressive totals in most of the others it chooses to contest, one-party rule is on its way out.

A THIRD lesson which might be drawn from the election is that American politics is heading for a period of transition. Old voting patterns are beginning to break up, and new ones have not begun to take their place. The election reflects, if anything, a sense of restlessness about the body politic.

Many more are stirred by the President’s exhortation to get the ball rolling again than are moved by Robert Welch’s pleas for personal action to stem the seemingly relentless tide of Communism, but both groups seem to be seeking an outlet in

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action.

IN MOST cases, the action is nothing more than turning out one bunch of rascals for another. Holding down a statehouse is getting to be a risky job; an ever larger number are coming to change hands every 2-4 years. A number of long-term congressmen lost their seats, and many more were in serious trouble.

The shuffling of public officials so that both parties win some and lose others but keep the totals about the same may reflect a basic confusion in the American voter. He's not quite satisfied with what he's got, but he's not so sure where he wants to go, either. When he finds out, the result is likely to be a minor revolution in American politics.