

... But the American party loves him anyway

By Stephan Leshner

John Schmitz is no George Wallace...



Presidential candidate Schmitz in his California office. The background painting is, appropriately, "The Spirit of '76."

He looks like an actor playing a night-club maitre d' in a nineteen-forties Busby Berkeley musical, and talks as if he is leading a seminar on neo-Neanderthal politics. But Congressman John G. Schmitz—professorial air, David Niven mustache and all—is whirling into as many as five cities and three states a day trying to turn the American party into something more than a limousine that George Wallace keeps in mothballs except for quadrennial outings to the polls.

As it happened, Governor Wallace, seriously wounded in an attempt on his life last

May, was physically unable to consider making a third-party run which had promised to be even more successful than the powerful showing he made in 1968. So lame-duck Congressman Schmitz, who had been plumping to become Wallace's running mate after Republican primary voters in his Southern California district ended his brief House career in favor of a Nixon-backed candidate, sought the Presidential nomination at the American party's first-ever national convention. He won it virtually unopposed.

Before making his acceptance speech to the more than 2,000 delegates in Louisville, Ky., Schmitz did something Wallace never had considered—he became a member of the American party. "I had tears streaming down my face," re-

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calls Eileen Shearer, a party official from San Diego. "You don't know how wonderful it felt to have a nominee of my party who actually was a member of my party."

Unlike Democrat Wallace, Republican Schmitz had precious little to lose by severing ties with his party. Early in his five-and-a-half year career in the California State Senate, he became *persona non grata* to Gov. Ronald Reagan for being the only Republican in either house to oppose Reagan's tax programs. (Reagan had promised the jittery Democrats supporting the tax that he would deliver the vote of every G.O.P. member of the State Assembly.) And in most of his two and a half years in Congress—especially after the President's trips to Peking and Moscow—Schmitz was more virulently anti-Nixon than George McGovern, Lawrence O'Brien and Herblock combined. After his primary election defeat in June, John Schmitz had no place else to go.

By no stretch of hyperbole is Schmitz a political heavyweight. He won his Presidential nomination primarily because the American party, so totally wrapped up in the fortunes of George Wallace for so long, had no place else to go either. But Schmitz, a long-standing member of the John Birch Society, joyfully welcomed the opportunity to reshape the party to his image—to make it a potentially viable political force of the far right.

"The party had been like a giant clam," says Larry Abraham, a darkly handsome young businessman from Olympia, Wash., who is Schmitz's Western states campaign director. "It opened wide for Wallace at campaign time and then shut tight. There'd be a few stragglers who'd fight like hell to keep the party structure going. But John fully intends to build it into a truly national political party so that by 1974 and, certainly, by 1976, we'll be fully qualified in every state and it won't be a regional or a one-man show."

The party, Abraham says, will not be built on the Wallace base. "Those were Wallace people," he says, "not American party people. Eventually, we hope to convince them that their real home is with us. But for now, they'll

vote for Nixon and, in some areas, even McGovern." The Wallace base was a significantly large potpourri of white, moderate-income Americans — pompadoured car salesmen, button-downed Jaycees, bouffanted secretaries, rough-knuckled farmers and grease-stained steelworkers. In the South, they are moving overwhelmingly to Nixon while in industrialized areas of the North, a surprising number are tending to favor McGovern.

The Schmitz base, such as it is, is far smaller. It is unlikely that Schmitz will receive even a fifth of the 10 million votes George Wallace commanded in 1968. But Schmitz's followers compose a dedicated, generally affluent group of white Americans who deeply believe that the Republic is threatened by a conspiracy masterminded by fat-cat international financiers in league with China and Russia and protected from public view by a Com-symp American press.

Gone are the rousing, evangelistic, foot-stomping rallies that filled huge auditoriums to hear George Wallace denounce the superrich, the superpoor, the criminals in the street and the judges on the bench. Gone, too, are the throaty roars of approval from those who desperately needed a George Wallace to reassure them that they—the "plain, average citizens" of America—had more common sense than "pointy-headed intellectuals, briefcase-totin' bureaucrats or the editor of The New York Times."

In their place is a lean, hard core of physicians, chiropractors, orthodontists, lawyers, real-estate developers, display-advertising executives, electronics engineers, insurance salesmen—richer, more sedate, more sophisticated and somehow more menacing than the earthy, knee-slapping throngs that came to adore Wallace. "This party," says Tucson, Ariz., American party official Del Myers, a 50-year-old insurance salesman, "is a distillation of the John Birch Society, the Christian Crusade and the Minutemen. We're revolutionaries. We're getting together to try to work through the system. But I'll say this. We'll have constitutional government in this country and if we don't get it through the ballot box, we'll get it in the streets."

Those are harsh words,

even for the 42-year-old Schmitz, who delights in snapping one-liners delivered out of the corner of his mouth, a habit he probably acquired during his eight years as a fighter pilot and classroom instructor on the Communist system in the post-Korea Marine Corps. "If Reagan and Javits both think Nixon is doing a fine job," he says, "one of them's getting fooled — or we're getting fooled about one of them...."

"Your choice in this election is between a man who broke almost every campaign promise and a man who you hope would break every campaign promise. . . . The choice now is between two wings of totalitarian socialism. . . .

"I've been asked who I would vote for if I were not in the race. That's a heck of a choice: Nixon, the candidate endorsed by Moscow and Peking; or George McGovern, endorsed by Hanoi and the Manson family. . . .

"Nixon is the living embodiment of the old political adage that if you get the reputation of being an early riser, you can sleep till 11.... [He] used to rant against Keynesian economics. Now he's bumbling and fumbling and fumbling in the same policies as the people he threw out. Now, Keynes said he was a Marxist and Nixon says he's a Keynesian. You figure it out. . . .

"If there were two Gods, Richard Nixon would pray to both of them."

Schmitz, who holds a master's degree in education and who taught history, philosophy and political science at Santa Ana College before entering politics eight years ago, also is serious in his speeches, though sometimes in phrases so convoluted that he confuses his listeners. "The immorality of the Vietnam war," he explains, "is that we're putting blue- and white-collar workers out of work by transferring their technology to a competitor which uses that technology to build a war machine which kills the sons of the blue- and white-collar workers in an undeclared, no-win war." The polite applause usually is accompanied by puzzled frowns.

"Being an old college professor," he concedes, "it's difficult for me to say anything in less than 50-minute segments." He tends to lose momentum in his speeches by delivering lengthy and meticulous quotes from sources ranging from Plotinus to Hans

Christian Andersen. He is just as meticulous in his daily routine which, despite a full campaign schedule, requires steadfast adherence to the Cooper Aerobics Exercise Program (which he credits for keeping his weight to a trim 150 pounds on his 5-foot-10½-inch frame) and two hours of nighttime reading (including authors such as John T. Flynn, Allen Drury and Taylor Caldwell). "I once heard that Mao Tse-tung reads two hours a day," he says. "If our enemies can do it, we've got to keep up with them."

A Catholic, Schmitz and his youthfully pretty wife, Mary, have seven children ranging from 2½ to 17, and both fervently oppose abortion. "If government can determine when life begins," he declares, usually to moderate audience response, "it is only a short step to government determining when life can end." But he grows furious with his church for what he considers its social liberality. "There's nothing wrong with the Catholic Church that a good inquisition wouldn't cure. . . . Catholics and Protestants both are now pushing the idea that it doesn't matter if you have a soul as long as you unionize your workers and integrate your schools. No wonder people aren't becoming priests and ministers anymore. They can join the Peace Corps if all they want to be is social workers." And he dismisses Women's Liberation with a throw-away line: "My wife, Mary, once was Women's Lib. She refuses to be lowered to the level of equality."

But, on occasion, Schmitz touches a genuinely exposed national nerve. Carefully instructing his audience on Pavlovian response, he says perceptively: "Words can produce the same kind of conditioned reflex in people—and politicians have found out that if they say one thing often enough and do another, voters will respond to what they say and not what they do."

Again, Nixon, of whom Wallace spoke only rarely and then in carefully modulated terms, is Schmitz's primary target. To Schmitz, it is Nixon, the turncoat, who must be doubly damned—not to mention Schmitz's belief that the American party's future permanence depends on Republican defectors, not on the here-today-gone-tomorrow

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Democrats who flocked to Wallace.

"Few people realize," Schmitz says, "that one-fourth of our entire national debt has been run up by Richard Nixon in just four short years under the guise of moderate conservatism. We can't blame the Democrats. Nixon had the votes to sustain his vetoes. . . . And he conned the American people into believing he had an antibusing program. But his bill starts out by saying the Government favors busing as long as other means for desegregation have been tried. . . . The American party is against forced busing to achieve a racial balance, is against forced busing to achieve racial integration, is against forced social relationships, period."

Schmitz's campaign is far from capturing public imagination. On a recent visit to Tucson, he was greeted at the airport by 17 mildly enthusiastic American party functionaries and their children. There were a few signs ("When You're Out of Schmitz, You're Out of Gear") and a few skimmers with bands proclaiming "Schmitz-Anderson" — Anderson being Schmitz's running mate, a Nashville, Tenn., columnist and one-time farm-journal editor, Thomas Jefferson Anderson. At the Redwood Gay Nineties Restaurant, 155 people paid \$10 each for a Saturday luncheon of roast beef, baked potato and peas. But these were the party faithful — the door-knockers, telephone-callers and envelope-stuffers.

The absence of noisy crowds to cheer Schmitz doesn't perturb his supporters. "The people in the party now are informed and able to analyze," explained Mrs. Doris Tretschok, a willowy blonde whose husband, Carl, is an American party candidate for Arizona corporation commissioner. "They're not after the free charge they got from Governor Wallace. I don't know, maybe we're just not wired for 220."

The Schmitz campaign is keeping the charge down on fund-raising dinners as well. At the Pasadena Hilton Hotel recently, more than 400 people paid only \$10 apiece for a sumptuous buffet of stuffed breast of capon, rice pilaf, Polynesian peas, white tuna fish and a selection of delicate pastries. "It sure beats hell out of Wallace's fried

chicken and barbecue ribs," observed a tuxedoed party-goer from Los Angeles.

But Schmitz was upstaged at the dinner by his national campaign chairman, the popular right-wing pamphleteer Dan Smoot of Dallas, Tex., who brought the crowd to its feet with a short, ringing speech: "I haven't approved of a President of the United States since Coolidge—and I had some reservations about him. For the first time in my life, we have a candidate for the Presidency whom I can support without reservation, without qualification, without limit.

"He is saying, 'Get the world off our back and let's defend ourselves.' He is saying, 'Get out of the U.N. and get the U.N. out of the U.S.' He is saying, 'If you get into a war, get into it legally and then win it.' Isn't it refreshing, isn't it thrilling, to have a Presidential candidate who promises people nothing but to leave them alone?"

It was a tough act for Schmitz to follow, especially because the oratory of a number of other party officials droned on for more than an hour (including a 12-minute opening prayer) and by then the audience was heavy with food and drink. The coup de grâce came when Schmitz stepped to the microphone and it went dead. "Conspir-

acy," called a man in the rear jokingly.

"You know," Schmitz said while relaxing in his room later and sipping Coors beer from a can, "you have to check yourself from getting paranoid about this conspiracy thing. Oh, I don't mean the mike. But we were on a filmed segment of a news show in Phoenix the other day and just as it began, the channel went dead. The station manager traced it and found that one of the station employes had cut it off the air intentionally. The guy got fired, of course. But when things like that happen, you just can't help wondering."

Schmitz wonders about conspiracy a great deal. His political Bible is a book by Gary Allen, his California campaign cochairman, entitled "None Dare Call It Conspiracy." In his foreword to this gossipy, undocumented and conjectural book, Schmitz warns readers that mass media journalists will brand it as gossipy, undocumented and conjectural. Among other charges, author Allen alleges that David Rockefeller traveled to the Soviet Union in 1964 "to fire an employee"—none other than Nikita Khrushchev. "Obviously," writes Allen, "the position of Premier in the Soviet Union is a figurehead with the true

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power residing elsewhere. Perhaps in New York." (More than five million copies of Allen's paperback are in print. The American party sells it for \$1 a copy, which helps raise a portion of the \$25,000 a week being spent on the Schmitz campaign.)

Schmitz tried recently to make headlines with what he termed documented evidence that Arthur Bremer was part of a conspiracy to kill Governor Wallace. The linchpin of his presentation was that Bremer had been identified as having attended three or four meetings of Students for a Democratic Society in the Milwaukee area. Schmitz also believes that other recent American assassins were conspirators. "Oswald, Ray, Sirhan, Bremer — they're supposed to be mixed-up loners. But you look into their background and you find they aren't loners at all. . . . And whether they're from the Fair Play for Cuba Committee or S.D.S., they've got one thing in common—they're all out of left field."

Schmitz also contends that because he angered Richard Nixon (who legally resides in Schmitz's district), the President ordered both money and manpower released to Schmitz's opponent. Whether or not Schmitz angered Nixon, he certainly turned off Nixon admirers in the Orange County Congressional district with lines like this one: "I'm not opposed to his visiting China. I'm only opposed to his coming back."

Schmitz will be on the ballot in 32 states, but he expects to win none, although he does hope to make a difference in California and Michigan, presumably to McGovern's benefit. In the apocalyptic mentality of the American party, a McGovern victory would speed the day when most Americans would turn, in fear and disgust, to "true" conservatism.

After the election, he will try to make a living teaching college again and lecturing, but he will devote most of his time to trying to swell American party ranks for the 1974 Congressional elections and, in 1976, for himself, for Wallace or for a new standard-bearer. For the unpretentious Schmitz, it is solace enough merely to spread his gospel of conspiracy to as large an audience as possible.

"At least I'm consistent," he shrugs. "And I sleep well at night." ■