

WARM-UP FOR AUGUST

Duffey vs. the Bailey Machine in Connecticut

BY RICHARD MARGOLIS



JOSEPH E. DUFFEY

HARTFORD

LATE ON THE night of Friday June 26, a Connecticut labor leader attending the Democratic state convention strode into Joseph E. Duffey's crowded campaign suite and demanded to know what he intended to do for the Machinists Union. "We're not fighting the Machinists," Duffey assured him, "we're fighting the machine."

Duffey, the gentle-mannered na-

tional chairman of Americans for Democratic Action and leader of the state party's reform wing, was running for U.S. Senator. The machine he was challenging, of course, was the one presided over by John M. Bailey—the Democratic *deus ex machina*—which for 24 years had been cranking out candidates. Now both Bailey and his political assembly line were beginning to slow down, apparent victims of time, attrition and Joseph E. Duffey.

Since nine o'clock that morning Duffey had been confined to a corner of his headquarters in the chrome-plated Hotel Sonesta, smiling with honest affection on a procession of delegates from such places as East Haddam, Goshen, Killingsworth, and Beacon Falls. ("He really *likes them*," an aide mumbled incredulously.) Duffey knew each one. He had been wooing them since November—not with any hope of winning a majority, but in the belief that he could gain the support of at least the 20 per cent (192) needed to qualify for a statewide primary.

All day Friday delegates kept

asking him, "Is it there, Joe? Have you got it?" Though Duffey said he had it, some of his questioners looked doubtful. Nobody, not even the professionals, had ever succeeded in forcing the Bailey organization to a primary.

And Duffey was hardly a professional. He was a soft-spoken, 38-year-old Congregational minister, virtually unknown until 1968 when he emerged, uncannily, as head of the party's McCarthy wing. The McCarthy group made surprising inroads, cracking Bailey's unit rule at the state convention and choosing 11 of the party's delegates to Chicago. The little uprising stirred latent discontents among many voiceless Democrats around Connecticut, and in Joe Duffey they found their voice.

It was a mild, sensible voice, but few thought it would prevail. When Duffey sought campaign funds from New York liberals who had fed the coffers of McCarthy and Robert Kennedy, he was told his senatorial aspirations were "unrealistic." If

RICHARD MARGOLIS, a free-lance writer, is a Connecticut resident.

Bailey was Goliath, who would pay for Duffey's slingshot? Not the fat cats, not the realists. Even Chester Bowles and Abraham Ribicoff, two of Duffey's more luminous supporters, privately despaired of his chances to capture 20 percent of the delegates.

By June 26 most of the 960 delegates seemed to have made up their minds: They liked Duffey, but they were not going to vote for him. Instead they would remain faithful to their habits, their associates and their jobs: They would vote for one Alphonsus J. Donahue, a hearty, white-haired zipper distributor from Stamford.

Over the years Donahue had acquired upwards of a dozen children, a million dollars and a taste for politics. Once it became clear last winter that Senator Thomas J. Dodd would not be renominated, Donahue announced for Senator and, in the fullness of time, won the Bailey organization's half-hearted endorsement. (Dodd subsequently had a heart attack and dropped out of the race, threatening to run later as an independent.)

There was a third candidate—State Senate Majority Leader Edward Marcus, a lonely, somewhat saturnine middle-of-the-roader. Marcus was neither in the organization's Bailey-wick nor in Duffey's camp of reform-minded, warring, priority-reordering liberals. He was nowhere. Still, he was predicting he would get 350 votes.

Marcus' campaign slogan was New Frontierish: "Tough, very tough, but so are the problems." In this there was an element of contempt for Duffey, a hint that the amateur was too soft and sentimental to be a politician. After Marcus decided to run for Senator he took Duffey to lunch and advised him to quit the race. (Duffey is such a pleasant fellow, his enemies never hesitate to give him bad advice.) "You'll only get about 8 per cent of the delegates, Joe," Marcus predicted. "On Friday night you'll sit in

your hotel room and count your sure votes, and that's when you'll have some hard decisions to make. When that happens, Joe, I'll be there."

NOW IT WAS Friday night (or early Saturday) and Duffey was counting his sure votes. Marcus, however, was nowhere in sight.

A broad-beamed lady delegate wearing a flowery print dress suddenly materialized on the sofa opposite Duffey. "What kind of a senator are you going to be?" she demanded. "Will your door be open to people like us or will you slam it shut like that Rubicoff [*sic*] fellow?" For an answer Duffey extended both hands to the lady, but she had already turned her back and was on her way to the candidate's hospitality bar nearby. "The candidates talk while the delegates drink," an aide whispered consolingly.

The lady delegate was replaced by a sad-eyed man with a crew cut who said that things were very tough in the Naugatuck Valley. "I'm with you all the way, Joe, you know that, but there's a lot of pressure on me." Duffey wanted to know what kind of pressure.

"Oh you know how things are down there," the delegate said. Duffey fingered his glasses and smiled questioningly. The sad-eyed man shrugged, clapped Duffey on the back and departed for the bar.

By 2 A.M. the ice had melted, the booze was gone and the staff was wilting; only Duffey was still going strong. His wife, Pat, and their two boys had long since gone home to bed. (The family lives in Hartford.) An assistant gazed sadly at a basket of fresh strawberries a well-wisher had sent over earlier that evening. They were smothered in delegates' cigarette butts. "Joe," the assistant pleaded, "it's time to go home. Tomorrow is another day."

Saturday morning was damp and

dreary, but the delegates at Bushnell Memorial Hall were in a holiday mood. Outside the huge stone building drummers and trumpeteers were already tuning up for carefully scheduled spontaneous demonstrations; pretty girls in miniskirts and straw hats were passing out candidates' buttons; unsmiling young men holding walkie-talkies to their ears wandered through the crowd, the silver aerials pointing confidently toward the clouds; a loudspeaker blared the wares of candidate Marcus—"tough, very tough"—and a Duffey "delegates-sen" dispensed free sandwiches and iced tea—"with love and hope," the sign said.

Inside the auditorium delegates reluctantly got down to business. It was going to be a long day. The Bailey organization's strategy was to place the senatorial nomination last on the agenda, thereby giving Donahue's men plenty of time to capture wavering votes. Meanwhile, the delegates started slogging through the long state ticket, beginning with the nomination for governor of Emilio (Mim) Q. Daddario, a moderate congressman who had no opposition.

Daddario had been fastidiously neutral in the senatorial fracas, but a few weeks before the convention word drifted down that he hoped Duffey would ultimately bow out of the race and settle for a place on the state ticket. The rumor alarmed Duffey loyalists, some of whom smelled "a deal." So Duffey met with Bailey. "I'd like you to tell Daddario two things," Duffey said. "First, I don't want a place on the state ticket. Second, I may smile a lot but I can be a real bastard."

A few days later Bailey saw Duffey again. "I gave Daddario your message," Bailey reported. "I told him you don't want a place on the state ticket and you're a bastard."

"Thank you," said Duffey.

For the final confrontation Duffey's organization set up its battle

station in a crowded two-room trailer outside Bushnell, near the stage entrance. There Duffey spent most of the day listening to Marcus' bagpipe band rehearse, suffering interviews with reporters and making occasional oblique suggestions to his staff ("Do we *have* to have a demonstration?").

In the morning his aides were plainly nervous. They wondered if their delegates would hold firm against the pressures and blandishments of Donahue and the regulars.

"How does it look, Leo?" Duffey asked a friendly delegate from Vernon, Connecticut.

"Well," replied Leo, "with a little luck and three Hail Marys, I think we'll make it."

By midafternoon the staff was smiling. Bailey's strategy of attrition seemed to be backfiring: Duffey was actually gaining votes. His observers on the convention floor kept squawking good news into their walkie-talkies: "No defections in Westport. . . . Waterbury is cracking. . . . Atkinson [Hartford's deputy mayor] has switched to Duffey. . . ." Leo returned to the trailer and grinned at Duffey. "I said the Hail Marys," he announced, "and they worked."

There remained the formality of the roll-call vote. All the nominating and seconding speeches had been duly delivered, and all the demonstrations had been allowed to run their noisy course. (Marcus' featured a full-sized straw donkey which his supporters carried up and down the aisles. It looked for all the world like a Trojan horse.)

The roll call began at sundown and continued into the night. Duffey watched on a small television set inside the trailer. He had no list of delegates in front of him, but he seemed to have one in his head. "Look out for this next fellow," he would say. "Donahue's people have been working on him." Then, when a doubtful delegate came through for Duffey:

"Thatta boy, Jack. That's the way to stand up to them."

Occasionally a delegate he had been counting on would slide away to Donahue. Duffey would shake his head in mild regret. "It's hard," he would say, as much for the errant delegate as for himself, "it's very hard."

Near the end of the balloting Duffey's total reached 192, the magic primary number, and both the convention hall and the Duffey trailer went wild. People screamed and thumped one another; some wept. Duffey and his wife gave



ALPHONSUS J. DONAHUE

each other a lingering, apolitical hug. They had done the impossible: In defiance of Bailey's best efforts, they had forced a statewide primary.

THE DRAMA was over, but now began the farce. As the roll call ended, the official tellers were under the impression that Donahue had failed to get the 481 votes he needed for official party endorsement. The tellers were wrong, Donahue had more than enough votes, but the slippery arithmetic of the thing threw the regulars into a panic.

Somehow a screw had worked loose from the Bailey machine. All business came to a halt while party leaders huddled hastily on the platform. Their dilemma, as they misunderstood it, was whether to confess that Donahue had failed to get more than 50 per cent of the vote, in which case there would be a second ballot, with attendant risks to Donahue's fragile cause; or whether to dragoon some Marcus and Duffey delegates into switching their votes.

There was little doubt about the course they would choose. While the astonished crowd looked on, two of their fellow delegates were grabbed and led—almost carried—up to a microphone on the platform. There, in dazed monotones reminiscent of *Darkness at Noon*, they announced they were switching their votes to Donahue. Having thus recanted, the luckless delegates were hurried back to their seats.

That is how Donahue "won" the party's endorsement, or at least so it seemed to most of those present. The final count gave him 488 votes, suggesting the machine's late-hour machinations had been irrelevant. Duffey ended up with 231 votes, Marcus with 221. Both were primary-bound. A fourth candidate, former Congressman Donald Irwin, received only 19 votes. (Minutes after the totals were announced, a joke went around that Donahue had tried to sell his cheapened endorsement to Irwin, but Irwin insisted on being paid in small bills.)

There will be a three-way Democratic primary in Connecticut on August 19, and the outcome is very much in doubt. As the party-endorsed candidate Donahue may have the inside track, but party endorsements these days can be a drag—as Theodore Sorenson discovered last month in New York. And nobody, not even his opposition, is telling Joe Duffey he can't win.