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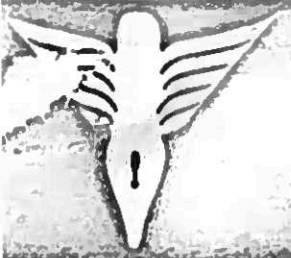
Edmund S. Muskie Papers

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Press Release - "So Goes the Nation:" Dividing Americans

Edmund S. Muskie

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FEATURE

"SO GOES THE NATION"

By
RELEASE:

U. S. SENATOR EDMUND S. MUSKIE
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DIVIDING AMERICANS

Vice President Agnew continues to stir the political pot with his broadsides against the news media, Democratic politicians, college administrators, students, dissenters, minority groups and anyone who questions the policies of the Nixon Administration. His rhetorical flourishes amuse some, anger others, and dismay me. While the President talks uniting America and lowering our voices, the Vice President stirs deep suspicions and hatreds, and divides millions of Americans.

The United States cannot afford the kinds of division the Vice President seeks to create. We need healthy debate and the free expression of differing ideas. We put our society in great peril if we try to intimidate those with different opinions, and if we try to suppress debate on questions of foreign policy, educational policies and social behavior.

The Vice President's objectives are clear. He has a view of what his America is like -- homogenized and isolated from the problems of poverty, hunger, social change, discrimination and frustrated ambition. He does not want America to change. Apparently he is willing to say almost anything in an effort to prevent change.

Two recent incidents illustrate the problems created by the Vice President. In one speech he attacked Senator Fulbright and suggested that the Senator was in a class with draft evaders and deserters. In another speech he attacked open admissions policies being used by some colleges in an attempt to overcome the inequities of discrimination against Black Americans. He called such ideas the product of "supercilious sophisticates."

Senator Fulbright's disagreement with the President on Vietnam policy is no secret. He has, for some years, questioned our presence in Vietnam. He has done so in his capacity as a United States Senator and as Chairman of

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the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. He has opposed the war because he did not believe it to be in the best interests of the United States. However one may view Senator Fulbright's arguments, one should not question his patriotism as the Vice President did.

As I have reviewed the Vice President's attack I have wondered what doubts he harbors over the validity of his arguments against Senator Fulbright's criticisms. If his defense of the Administration were strong, he would not have to indulge in insults and the technique of guilt by association. The nature of his attack has not enhanced the Administration's position, and it has further damaged the possibility of a rational discussion of our policy in Vietnam.

I have been puzzled even more by the Vice President's attack on college open admissions policies. Open admissions is an experiment, designed to give young people from disadvantaged backgrounds a chance for a college education. It is similar to the liberal admissions policies practiced by colleges and universities after World War II for veterans seeking admission under the GI Bill. It does not guarantee a college degree, but it does guarantee a chance to earn that degree. It recognizes that poverty carries with it educational as well as economic deprivation.

What does the Vice President fear from efforts to expand educational opportunities for the poor? Or does he believe that others fear the changes those opportunities may bring, and see an opportunity to exploit those fears? In either case, his attack is an unworthy one, based not on logic or an effort to explore alternative solutions to a troublesome problem. His attack is an invitation to further suspicion, fear and hatred in our society.

It may be that the time has come to ask the Administration's chief political spokesman to lower his voice and raise his sights.

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