

Blanchard runs in center of road

By Tim Richard
staff writer

To the Democratic State Convention in Flint, it seemed like the old-time religion.

On stage were Martha and Hicks Griffiths, credited with being co-founders of the modern Democratic Party, with Martha now the nominee for lieutenant governor; G. Mennen Williams, once their law partner and (in 1948) first successful gubernatorial candidate; and Neil Staeble, who led the Dems to a series of victories in the 1950s and '60s.

There was fiery, stem-winding oratory from James Blanchard, the congressman from Pleasant Ridge who is this year's gubernatorial nominee and front-runner in the polls. Intra-party bickering was almost non-existent. Party people and reporters called it a coronation, a love feast, with a taste of victory in the air.

But there was something different about Blanchard's message. In the party of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the UAW, he was borrowing pages from Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower.

FOR BLANCHARD was consciously



Candidate Blanchard aroused the troops in Flint.

staff photo

straddling the middle of the road, painting Richard Headlee not as the Republican nominee but as the darling of a narrow segment of the GOP. There was no wholesale attack on the Republican Party.

"... Mr. Headlee and his narrow faction of the Republican Party,"

"... like so many right-wing proposals."

"We want Mr. Headlee to know that there is nothing in the state constitution that says the governor must start a new fight every day."

"And that (Democratic) message

must be made to moderate Republicans and independents as well as to Democrats."

"And we must ask some questions about Mr. Headlee and his narrow brand of Republicanism."

"Does anyone believe that the party to lead us out of a depression is the Headlee party?"

"It's a clear choice — between experience in government and extremism, between cooperation and conflict..."

IT WAS LIKE a page out of "A Republican Looks at His Party," written

analysis

In 1956 by Arthur Larson, Ike's under-secretary of Labor. Wrote Larson:

"President Eisenhower and his associates have, for the first time in our history, discovered and established the Authentic American Center in politics... a common meeting ground of the great majority of our people."

Larson preached that Americans weren't split into left vs. right wing camps. Rather, the bulk of Americans had centrist tendencies. The candidate who could capture the center could be elected and govern successfully.

Arrayed against the Center were the forces of 1855 (the year McKinley was elected) and 1936 (FDR's second victory). Both were behind the times, in Larson's view. Ike loved Larson and promoted him to be director of the U.S. Information Agency.

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