

A Round with McKeldin

By EDGAR L. JONES

A few months ago Mr. McKeldin as an ex-Governor had a subdued appearance. Active campaigning has changed that. On one recent morning he had been to the Keswick Home early for a visit with old friends. Back at the office he was reveling in the fruits of the morning's mail: campaign contributions. "Look at that, a check for \$1,000 from a man in Westminster. Years ago I taught him public speaking, and the other day he called to see if I needed any help. And here's another check, and another—all this morning."

With growing exuberance he displayed two rolls of cash, "Democratic cash" as he termed it, brought in by men who were quietly crossing party lines. *Waving the money as though it were the results of a political poll*, he said that when a candidate looks as though he has a chance of winning, that's when the money starts coming in. Four years ago, after J. Harold Grady had won the primary, it was dead around his office, he recalled. Nobody was bringing in money then. But this time it is different, the candidate believes; the backers can smell victory.

With a time out to discuss bumper stickers for the Doctors for McKeldin Committee and a thigh-slapping "jimmy crimony" when an aide announced that a prominent Catholic would do a tape for him, McKeldin grew momentarily reflective on the proposition that Mr. Grady, unlike himself, had no taste for public life and had lost control. The McKeldin decibels rose as he went from there to "petty" figures and "peanut" politics at City Hall, and the full oratorical splendor came with the familiar recitation of the great men that he had brought into City Hall when he was a wartime mayor.

Asked about his campaigning, he ticked off his activities on the busy previous day, beginning with a favorable meeting with business leaders whose ranks were studded with Democrats. *He lingered with particular delight over a chance stop in the evening at a boys club where Mayor Goodman had been scheduled to present awards. In the Mayor's absence Mr. McKeldin had made the presentations and given an impromptu talk, telling the boys the fable of the fingers (moral: no one finger is more important than the others; they all must work together).*

Mr. McKeldin repeated the fable for an audience of one. With equal disregard for the size of his audience, he read several speeches that he has yet to give publicly. As he would at least twice more that day, he also gave a short summary of a "beautiful" speech

he had given recently to a *Latino* group in Philadelphia. It was a "beautiful" speech he repeated, and then, after an appropriate pause, he added, "one of the best Gerald Johnson ever wrote."

By then it was long past the customary lunch time and Mr. McKeldin corraled his secretary and a campaign worker to go downstairs to the lunch room for a quick sandwich, interspersed with entreaties to everyone who passed the table to "please vote for me on May 7." Outside, waiting for a ride, it was the same routine: Everyone who passed got a greeting, a smile or handclasp, and an election reminder.

The afternoon was set aside to visit police stations. *On the way to South* an aide bemoaned the fact that they did not have so much as a packet of matches to give away. Mr. McKeldin replied rather sharply: "In a police station you don't give things away." He didn't, either, unless one counts his own energy and personality, freely dispensed: the big grin at every open door, the handshakes with new men, the back slaps for familiar figures, the chats with the older hands whose pasts were linked with his own, such as the police captain who remembered proudly that he had been the motorcycle escort at the McKeldin mayoral inaugural of twenty years ago.

"Let's walk," he said, outside again, and in between bursts of enthusiasm for his South Baltimore boyhood he shook hands with passersby, old men on front steps, women tending small grocery stores and stallkeepers in the Cross Street Market. Concentrating for a moment on the ice cream bar he had picked up along the way, he missed one man who had called him by name and run back half a dozen steps to correct the omission.

When the time drew close for the change of shifts at Central and no bus or taxi was in sight, Mr. McKeldin elected to stand in the street in the hopes someone would recognize him. With the McKeldin luck, close to the first car to pass thereafter was that of Jim Foley, traffic director. While Mr. McKeldin did not recognize him at first, he knew the city driver from way back. The quick delivery service enabled him to reach police headquarters during the period when the maximum number of patrolmen are milling about.

From rookies on up to the police commissioner, the McKeldin presence was exerted in the corridors and through doors where normally appointments are advisable, with always the hand-shake, sometimes an anecdote or a reference to the policemen in the McKeldin family and once, with the commissioner, a short sitting-down visit. In a storeroom he met a man who recalled that they had worked together in a bank at \$20 a month in 1919. In the elevator he hailed an incoming passenger who responded to the McKeldin affability with a complaint that the policemen looming behind him had come and taken him from his house without telling him the charges. It was the only time all afternoon that Mr. McKeldin backed away.

Back at the office at 5 o'clock, Mr. McKeldin slumped on a couch and yawned. Wasn't he tired? Well, at the moment he felt tired, because he had not gone to bed until 2 A.M., but it would be different when he got out again. As a man of early Methodist training who does not drink, smoke or dance (but has no objections if others do), his stimulant is people. He loves people, he says, and if he has nothing else to do he goes to the Civic Center half an hour before an event to mingle with the arriving crowd.

What about the rest of this day? First, he said, he would arrange to get a table near the door of a prominent East Baltimore restaurant and spend about an hour and a half eating and greeting people. Then he would go to an open house at a department store and shake as many hands as possible. After that he was scheduled to speak before two meetings, one political and the other more sedate. Then (another stifled yawn) he should get to bed because he was doing a television bit at 8.30 the next morning.

At this point the telephone rang, and he sprang up and began a boisterous conversation, somehow making his enthusiasm as tangible as a back slap. Mr. McKeldin had found a fresh audience, and was refreshed once again.

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