

DANIEL PATRICK MOYNIHAN, THE 1976 NEW YORK SENATE RACE, AND THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE AMERICAN LIBERALISM*

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ABSTRACT. *The 1970s was a decade of acute existential crisis for the Democratic party, as ‘New Politics’ insurgents challenged the old guard for control of both the party apparatus and the right to define who a true ‘liberal’ was. Those Democrats who opposed New Politics reformism often found themselves dubbed ‘neoconservatives’. The fact that so many ‘neoconservatives’ eventually made their home in the Grand Old Party (GOP) has led historians to view them as a Republican bloc in embryo. The apostasy of the neoconservatives fits neatly into the political historiography of the 1970s, which is dominated by the rise of the New Right and its takeover of the Republican party. Yet this narrative, though seductive, overlooks the essentially protean character of politics in that decade. This article uses the 1976 Senate campaign mounted by Daniel Patrick Moynihan – the dandyish Harvard academic, official in four presidential administrations, and twice US ambassador – to demonstrate that many ‘neoconservatives’ were advancing a recognizably liberal agenda and seeking to define a new ‘vital center’ against the twin poles of the New Politics and the New Right. A microcosm of a wider struggle to define liberalism, Moynihan’s candidacy complicates our understanding of the 1970s as an era of rightward drift.*

In the twenty years since Alan Brinkley diagnosed ‘The problem of American conservatism’ and called upon his colleagues to exhibit more ‘historical imagination’ in reconstructing previously neglected traditions, new works on twentieth-century conservatism have proliferated.¹ This has led to a hardening

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¹ Alan Brinkley, ‘The problem of American conservatism’, *American Historical Review*, 99 (Apr. 1994), pp. 409–29.

consensus about the character of the 1970s, a decade that had often defied interpretative synthesis.² Where once Peter Carroll could pronounce archly that ‘It seemed like nothing happened’, historical accounts increasingly assert that what actually happened was, as Julian Zelizer and Bruce Schulman have put it, ‘the massive mobilization by activists, organizations, and political elites associated with the conservative movement’. In the decade before Reagan’s victory, the United States was inexorably ‘rightward bound’.³

The corollary of this ‘triumph of conservatism’ narrative is the collapse of liberalism and of the principal vehicle of its promulgation, the Democratic party. However, such a narrative, though seductive, overlooks the essentially protean character of politics in that decade. From the vantage point of the mid-1970s, the terminal decline of the Democratic party is by no means obvious. In 1972, when Democrat George McGovern had lost heavily to incumbent President Richard Nixon, it was possible to believe, with former Nixon aide Kevin Phillips, that America was witnessing the emergence of a new Republican majority.⁴ Yet, this realignment seemed decidedly less certain by 1974 when, with the Watergate crisis in full swing, the share of the electorate identifying as Republicans shrank to 18 per cent.⁵ By 1976, with Democratic congressional majorities swollen and apparently secure, and the party poised to retake the White House, Democrats could reassure themselves that the Grand Old Party (GOP) had squandered an opportunity to supplant them as the nation’s majority party. As Bruce Wolpe, chief of staff to newly elected Californian Democratic congressman Henry Waxman, would later recall, ‘the Republicans were pathetic . . . the country wasn’t listening to them. So we didn’t have to pay any attention to them’.⁶

² For the best syntheses, see Peter N. Carroll, *It seemed like nothing happened: America in the 1970s* (New Brunswick, NJ, and London, 1990); Bruce Schulman, *The seventies: the great shift in American culture, society, and politics* (New York, NY, 2001); Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something happened: a political and cultural overview of the seventies* (New York, NY, 2006); and Thomas Borstelmann, *The 1970s: a new global history from civil rights to economic inequality* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2012).

³ Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward bound: making America conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2008), p. 3. See also, among others, Sean Wilentz, *The age of Reagan: a history, 1974–2008* (New York, NY, 2008); Rick Perlstein, *Nixonland: the rise of a president and the fracturing of America* (New York, NY, and London, 2008); Dominic Sandbrook, *Mad as hell: the crisis of the 1970s and the rise of the populist right* (New York, NY, 2011); Jonathan Schoenwald, *A time for choosing: the rise of modern American conservatism* (New York, NY, 2001); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban warriors: the origins of the new American right* (Princeton, NJ, and Oxford, 2001); William C. Berman, *America’s right turn: from Nixon to Bush* (Baltimore, MD, and London, 1994); Laura Kalman, *Right star rising: a new politics, 1974–1980* (New York, NY, and London, 2010). For a fine, critical review of this historiography, see Julian E. Zelizer, ‘Rethinking the history of American conservatism’, *Reviews in American History*, 38 (2010), pp. 367–92.

⁴ Kevin Phillips, *The emerging Republican majority* (New Rochelle, N. Y., 1969).

⁵ Yanek Mieczkowski, *Gerald Ford and the challenges of the 1970s* (Lexington, KY, 2005), p. 65.

⁶ Author interview with Bruce Wolpe, Washington, DC, 20 Jan. 2012.

This is not to deny the reality of an existential crisis within the Democratic party. By the end of the 1960s, the Democratic establishment was under assault by a reformist contingent that rallied under the banner of the 'New Politics', an assault that continued into the 1970s as each faction struggled to shape the party's destiny. The New Politics had been born in opposition to the Vietnam War and had, by the 1970s, evolved into a broader critique of establishment liberalism. It coalesced first into a challenge to President Lyndon B. Johnson, through the insurgent campaigns of Senators Eugene McCarthy and Robert Kennedy in 1968. Having forced Johnson into a premature retirement, the New Politics activists proved unable to derail the establishment's candidate, Hubert Humphrey, but did succeed in inducing the national convention to establish the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection to reform the rules by which the Democratic party selected its presidential nominees and convention delegations. Dubbed the McGovern-Fraser Commission, after its two chairmen, this body set out to democratize the primary process and open the party's structures to previously marginalized groups, primarily women, blacks, and youths.⁷ New Politics liberals were disdainful of the party's traditional power brokers, most notably trade unions, who they regarded as parochial, reactionary, and racist. There was certainly some truth to that accusation, but many traditional Democrats and labour leaders feared that such identity politics would advance 'minorities' at the expense of white, mostly male, workers, pitting an already embattled blue-collar America against itself.⁸ New Politics priorities, however, reflected the conviction that liberalism's future lay, as the journalist Jack Newfield defined it, in a coalition of 'campus, ghetto, and suburb'.⁹ In 1972, they had a chance to test the viability of this coalition through the candidacy of Senator George McGovern, first chair of the Reform Commission, whose dazzling grassroots campaign would deftly exploit the new rules to leapfrog more recognized candidates into the nomination.¹⁰

At the same convention that nominated McGovern, the old guard was organizing to retake the Democratic party and return it to the tradition of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy, and Johnson. These regulars – an ad hoc alliance of labour leaders, party elders, and liberal intellectuals – were disgusted by what

⁷ An exhaustive account of the commission's deliberations and their consequences can be found in Byron E. Shafer, *Quiet revolution: the struggle for the Democratic party and the future of post-reform politics* (New York, NY, 1983).

⁸ A useful account of the schism within the Democratic party over the place of the labour movement can be found in Judith Stein's deeply researched and forcefully argued *Pivotal decade: how the United States traded factories for finance in the seventies* (New Haven, CT, and London, 2010), esp. ch. 3. See also Taylor E. Dark, *The unions and the Democrats: an enduring alliance* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 1999), ch. 4; and Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the union: a century of American labor* (rev. edn, Princeton, NJ, 2013), chs. 5–6.

⁹ Newfield quoted in Lewis Chester, Godfrey Hodgson, and Bruce Page, *An American melodrama: the presidential campaign of 1968* (New York, NY, 1969), p. 376.

¹⁰ Bruce Miroff, *The liberals' moment: the McGovern insurgency and the identity crisis of the Democratic party* (Lawrence, KS, 2007).

they perceived as the self-indulgence, rejection of coalition politics, and anti-internationalist inclinations of the New Politics. Within a month of its establishment, and calling themselves the Coalition for a Democratic Majority (CDM), the counterattack was launched with ads in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* titled, in an echo and repudiation of McGovern, 'Come home, Democrats'. Along with the organizing committee, the ad featured a 'partial list' of seventy-two high-profile sponsors of the coalition. 'For too long now', it declared, 'the voices of common-sense liberals have been barely audible in the blare of the New Politics.' What was needed was 'a robust voice' to reply to the cacophony.¹¹

CDM supporters, who understood themselves as defenders of their party's New Deal and Cold War traditions, soon found themselves tagged with a new and tenacious label: 'neoconservative'. The term had reputedly been coined by the socialist writer and activist, Michael Harrington, in a 1973 article for *Dissent* magazine, to describe those liberals, and democratic socialists, who he felt were forsaking credos they had once supported.¹² As many members of the CDM would eventually make their political home in the Republican party, it is tempting to embrace 'neoconservatism' as convenient shorthand for their political beliefs. However, this would obscure the character of their advocacy, at least in the mid-1970s, when the situation in the Democratic party and the wider political scene seemed very much in flux. Most of those to whom the label was applied fiercely resisted it. According to John Ehrman, it is more accurate, albeit unwieldy, to describe these 'neoconservatives' as 'veterans of the vital center'.¹³ They should be understood not as proto-conservatives but as one faction in an intra-party dispute over what it meant to be a 'liberal' in the unsettled political, economic, and social climate of the 1970s.

A name not among the ads' co-sponsors was that of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the eccentric and dandyish academic and politician who had recently retired from a position as the 'house liberal' in the Nixon administration.¹⁴ Moynihan was to become one of the robust voices that the CDM relied upon to defend its particular brand of liberalism. By the 1970s, Moynihan was, much to his chagrin, increasingly being identified with the neoconservative tendency. In 1976, he would launch himself into the race for one of New York's Senate seats, in part at the urging of regulars within the state party who opposed

¹¹ The refrain of McGovern's acceptance speech at the 1972 convention had been 'Come Home, America.' CDM ad, *New York Times* (NYT), 7 Dec. 1972 and *Washington Post-Times Herald* (WP-TH), 7 Dec. 1972.

¹² Michael Harrington, 'The welfare state and its neoconservative critics', *Dissent* (autumn 1973).

¹³ John Ehrman, *The rise of neoconservatism: intellectuals and foreign affairs, 1945-1994* (New Haven, CT, 1995), p. 34.

¹⁴ Many who would go on to support Moynihan's 1976 campaign were signatories to the ad, including journalist Michael Novak, businessman Richard Ravitch, Bayard Rustin, A. Philip Randolph, Norman Podhoretz, Midge Decter, Albert Shanker, and Max Kampelman.

Representative Bella Abzug, a New Politics doyenne and, in the absence of a strong opponent, the likely victor in the Democratic primary.

The lesson that the CDM and its 'neoconservative' supporters had drawn from the elections of 1972 was that, in rejecting McGovern while re-electing a Democratic Congress, the voters had declared that 'American society should continue on in that very Democratic tradition which, abandoned by the forces temporarily in control of the National Democratic party in 1972, was usurped in some measure by the Republicans'.¹⁵ An examination of Moynihan's 1976 Senate campaign reveals a politician at the forefront of the effort to reclaim that tradition, crafting an internally consistent alternative to the liberalism he perceived to be in the ascendant in the Democratic party. The campaign would confirm for Moynihan and his supporters the validity of their critique. It would pit Moynihan first against the New Politics-backed Abzug in the primaries and then against an avatar of the New Right, incumbent Senator James Buckley in the general election. In squaring off first against Abzug and then Buckley, Moynihan seemed to be outlining the middle course that Democrats needed to take to secure their long-term political fortunes. The 1976 New York Senate race was both one front in and a microcosm of this wider struggle.

I

Born in Oklahoma in 1927, Moynihan had been raised in New York City.¹⁶ After high school, he worked briefly as a longshoreman, before enrolling at the City College of New York. He joined the navy, receiving officer training, and was educated to Ph.D. level at Tufts University before a year as a Fulbright Scholar at the London School of Economics (LSE). Launching his political career on the staff of New York governor W. Averell Harriman, he later became assistant secretary of labor under John F. Kennedy. Following Kennedy's assassination, he briefly became a favourite of Lyndon Johnson, becoming involved in civil rights policy. In 1965, he drafted an internal report which was to bring him to unwelcome national attention. In this report, *The Negro family: the case for national action*, Moynihan argued that disproportionately high rates of black unemployment, poverty, and welfare enrolment, as well as the pervasive legacy of slavery and discrimination, had led to the 'profound weakening of Negro family structure'.¹⁷ A 'tangle of pathology', he wrote, perpetuated a black underclass and only forceful government action could break the cycle. When the report leaked, the response was explosive. Moynihan was accused of racism, cultural bias, and

¹⁵ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, 'Anti-New Politics Liberals', *WP-TH*, 12 Nov. 1972.

¹⁶ The foregoing potted biography is based principally on Godfrey Hodgson, *The gentleman from New York: Daniel Patrick Moynihan: a biography* (Boston, MA, 2000), and Douglas E. Schoen, *Pat: a biography of Daniel Patrick Moynihan* (New York, NY, 1979).

¹⁷ Daniel P. Moynihan, *The Negro family: the case for national action* (Washington, DC, 1965); see also James T. Patterson, *Freedom is not enough: the Moynihan report and America's struggle over black family life from LBJ to Obama* (New York, NY, 2010).

victim-blaming. He left the Johnson administration shortly thereafter and, after an abortive bid for the presidency of the New York city council in 1965, returned to academia.

In 1969, Moynihan was plucked from a Harvard professorship by the newly inaugurated President Richard Nixon to serve on the White House staff as counsellor for urban affairs. His signature policy preoccupation in this role was the Family Assistance Plan (FAP), a guaranteed income scheme that sought to cut through the Gordian knot of welfare reform. FAP would eventually founder on an unlikely congressional alliance of conservative Republicans and liberal Democrats. Moynihan bitterly regretted the defeat and particularly resented the fierce liberal opposition.¹⁸ Then, in 1970, another leaked internal memo was to reopen old wounds. Moynihan had been growing increasingly concerned about intemperate rhetoric on matters of race and about the possibility of a backlash from a weary public that might jeopardize black gains. '[T]he issue of race could benefit from a period of "benign neglect"', he wrote to Nixon. 'The subject has been too much talked about . . . We need a period in which Negro progress continues and racial rhetoric fades.'¹⁹ When this memo leaked, the most damning phrase was the one that Moynihan had chosen for its eye-catching qualities: 'benign neglect'. Once again, Moynihan found himself denounced as a racist. For many liberals and African-Americans, suspicions raised by the 1965 report were confirmed by this. Stung after FAP's defeat and by fresh accusations of bigotry, Moynihan retreated to Harvard.

He was, however, not to remain long. In 1973, the now embattled Nixon appointed him ambassador to India. Two years later, with Gerald Ford in the White House, Moynihan found himself appointed US ambassador to the United Nations. The cause of Moynihan's appointment was an article he had written for *Commentary* in March 1975, 'The United States in opposition'.²⁰ Moynihan used this article to argue that the political culture of the decolonizing Third World was defined by British socialism, in particular the authoritarian Fabian variant that had emerged from the LSE.²¹ As a direct consequence, the United States found itself outnumbered in the international community, and outvoted in the UN, by anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-American autocracies. The solution was for the US 'to go into opposition' within the United Nations. If an anti-American majority would deny it policy advances, argued

¹⁸ For more on FAP, see Gareth Davies, *From opportunity to entitlement: the transformation and decline of Great Society liberalism* (Lawrence, KS, 1996), pp. 211–33.

¹⁹ Memo, Daniel P. Moynihan (DPM) to Richard Nixon, 16 Jan. 1970, papers of Daniel P. Moynihan, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, part 1, box 255.

²⁰ Daniel P. Moynihan, 'The United States in opposition', *Commentary* (Mar. 1975).

²¹ As anthropologist St Clair Drake pointed out, this was a dramatic oversimplification of the political cultures of these post-colonial nations, only a small minority of which could be said to have been influenced by Fabianism. St Clair Drake, 'Moynihan and the Third World', *Nation*, 5 July 1975.

Moynihan, then the US should at least use its moral authority to shame autocratic nations in the general assembly for corruption and abuses of power.

Though he spent less than a year in the post, at the UN Moynihan established himself as a pugnacious defender of American ideals and interests, courting national popularity for the first time in his career. His most dramatic confrontation was in leading the opposition to UN General Assembly resolution 3379 which condemned Zionism as 'a form of racism and racial discrimination'. Moynihan's opposition was based less on any intense pro-Zionist sentiment, but rather on what Israel represented. What made the confrontation significant was that the resolution was sponsored principally by authoritarian Arab and Third World states and apparently the product of Soviet machinations. Israel was, Moynihan declared, 'one of the very few places . . . where Western democratic principles survive, and of all such places, currently the most exposed'.²² Despite a determined effort to defeat the resolution, ultimately Moynihan could offer only symbolic acts of resistance. Famously, after the resolution cleared the UN's Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural Committee, Moynihan pushed his way through the press of delegates to Chaim Herzog, Israel's ambassador to the UN, who had given a defiant address to the committee, and embraced him in full view of the hall.²³ When the General Assembly passed the resolution some three weeks later, a furious Moynihan rose to declare that the United States 'does not acknowledge, it will not abide by, it will never acquiesce in this infamous act'.²⁴

Ambassador Moynihan infuriated both fellow diplomats and his State Department superiors. However, growing admiration of his style among the American public offered some insulation. By January 1976, the US mission to the UN had received over 28,000 pieces of mail relating to Moynihan's performance, fewer than 200 of which were critical. Praise came from former California governor Ronald Reagan, then challenging Ford for the Republican presidential nomination. Moynihan was an early champion of the muscular patriotism – in Gil Troy's coinage, 'the politics of patriotic indignation' – that Reagan would use to such great effect in the 1980 election.²⁵ Months after the fall of Saigon and the communist takeover of Cambodia, at a moment of intense existential crisis for the United States, the fact that one of its representatives was mounting such an impassioned, often impolitic defence of its values proved immensely popular. One poll found 70 per cent of respondents wanted

²² 'Moynihan says U.N. must bar resolution condemning Zionism', *NYT*, 22 Oct. 1975.

²³ Paul Hofmann, 'U.N. unit endorses draft linking Zionism to racism', *NYT*, 18 Oct. 1975.

²⁴ Moynihan discusses his tenure at the UN in *A dangerous place* (with Suzanne Weaver) (Boston, MA, 1978). For a detailed and sympathetic account of the battle over Resolution 3379, see Gil Troy, *Moynihan's moment: America's fight against Zionism as racism* (New York, NY, and Oxford, 2013).

²⁵ Clayton Fritchley, 'Moynihan-Kissinger split: a matter of style', *Washington Post* (*WP*), 6 Dec. 1975; Troy, *Moynihan's moment*, p. 9.

Moynihan to continue speaking out 'frankly and forthrightly' even at the expense of 'tact and diplomacy'.²⁶

Moynihan's pyrotechnics at the UN led more than one observer to wonder at his wider ambitions. The chatter rose to such a distracting level that in October 1975, appearing on *Face the nation* in the midst of the 'Zionism is racism' fight, Moynihan was asked outright about his intentions towards New York's Senate seat. His denial was emphatic. 'I would consider it dishonorable to leave this post and run for any office', he told the interviewer. It was one among many unequivocal disavowals. Moynihan's initial reluctance to enter the Senate primary, according to friends, was in part because of such statements. Already reviled by some as an unscrupulous opportunist for his service in the Nixon administration, he had no desire to undermine his reputation further in a potentially fruitless quest.²⁷

II

Democrats enjoyed a historical voter registration advantage in New York State but often found it difficult to translate this into electoral success. As Moynihan never tired of reminding voters during his run, from 1950 until 1976, with the exception of Robert Kennedy, New York returned no Democratic senators to Washington. In part, this was due to New York's unusual party system. The state had four major parties—Democratic, Republican, Liberal, and Conservative—and all had a nomination to bestow. Unusual permutations were common, with some Republican senators, such as Jacob Javits, winning the imprimatur of the Liberal party. Moreover, the New York State Democratic party was divided between its regular and reformer wings.²⁸ Moynihan had witnessed the damage wrought by these divisions first-hand at the 1958 state convention, when a dispute between the regular and the reform wings over a Senate candidate produced televised deadlock. The result of this was a humiliating defeat for the Democratic slate in that year's elections 'at just the moment when almost everywhere else the Democratic party was surging to power'. Though Moynihan identified with 'the reform element', he was 'appalled' that its supposed lack of foresight had engineered this catastrophe.²⁹

By the mid-1970s, however, it seemed the stars were aligning for New York's Democrats, with economic downturn, Watergate, and Republican mishandling

²⁶ 'A fighting Irishman at the U.N.', *Time*, 26 Jan. 1976.

²⁷ 'Moynihan sees U.N. assembly voting anti-Zionism resolution', *NYT*, 27 Oct. 1975; Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, p. 259.

²⁸ See James Q. Wilson, *The amateur Democrat: club politics in three cities* (Chicago, IL, and London, 1966); Warren Moscow, *The last of the big-time bosses: the life and times of Carmine de Sapio and the rise and fall of Tammany Hall* (New York, NY, 1971).

²⁹ Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Coping: essays on the practice of government* (New York, NY, 1973), pp. 8–11.

of New York City's fiscal crisis offering them their best opportunity in decades to retake a Senate seat. The 1974–5 recession was the worst to hit the United States since the Great Depression, and it had a particularly deleterious effect on the nation's already weakened cities. Post-war prosperity, together with technological advancements, had led to rapid suburbanization, which in turn left the inner cities with diminished tax bases and poorer populations. Collapsing infrastructure, rising crime, and expanding welfare rolls soon followed, which only exacerbated the flight to the suburbs. New York City (NYC) was to become emblematic of the urban crisis. From the 1960s, with mounting outlays and declining revenues, NYC became dangerously reliant on the sale of notes and bonds to service a growing budget deficit and meet its annual operating costs. By early 1975, Manhattan banks refused to underwrite further loans and the city was forced to turn to the federal government for relief.³⁰

President Ford rejected this outright, advising the city to pursue stringent cost-cutting measures instead. A staunch fiscal conservative, with few options and a limited political imagination, Ford had opted to tackle the economic downturn by reducing the federal budget deficit. Recapitalizing NYC was not conducive to prudence. The appeals continued throughout 1975 while Ford remained intransigent.³¹ In October, Ford defended his position in a speech to the National Press Club, arguing that any bail-out would only encourage further profligacy by New York's municipal authorities. The president may have imagined he was administering some tough love, but the people of New York settled on a less generous interpretation. The *New York Daily News* distilled the resentment when it reported the speech under the infamous headline, 'FORD TO CITY: DROP DEAD'. Ford eventually relented, signing the New York City Seasonal Financing Act towards the end of 1975 which authorized loans of \$2.3 billion in each of the three subsequent financial years.³²

James L. Buckley, the incumbent senator seeking re-election in 1976, had been a vociferous opponent of the bail-out. The elder brother of *National Review* founder William F. Buckley, Jr, he had won his seat in 1970 as the nominee of the Conservative party in a split field. As the city's financial condition worsened, Buckley had clung tenaciously to his anti-statist convictions despite their political toxicity. Any intervention by Washington, said Buckley, would 'further erod[e] our Federal system'.³³ Partially as a result of this principled but wildly unpopular stance, Buckley was thought to be acutely vulnerable to

³⁰ Roger Biles, *The fate of the cities: urban America and the federal government, 1945–2000* (Lawrence, KS, 2011), p. 201; Vincent J. Cannato, *The ungovernable city: John Lindsay and his struggle to save New York* (New York, NY, 2002), pp. 548–53.

³¹ Martin Tolchin, 'Ford again denies fiscal aid to city', *NYT*, 18 Oct. 1975.

³² Biles, *Fate of the cities*, pp. 210–12. See also Seymour P. Lachlan and Robert Polner, *The man who saved New York: Hugh Carey and the great fiscal crisis of 1975* (Albany, NY, 1975).

³³ Martin Tolchin, 'Buckley opposes U. S. intervention in city's crisis', *NYT*, 24 Sept. 1975.

a Democratic challenge. By February 1976, the *Washington Post* reported that no fewer than a dozen Democrats were exploring a Senate run.³⁴ But Moynihan, despite fevered speculation about his possible candidacy, hesitated.

One could dismiss Moynihan's vacillation as calculated, but there is no reason to believe that he was not genuinely reluctant to commit himself to an arduous campaign given the obstacles he faced. Many liberals were unwilling to forgive his apparent disloyalty. His service in the Nixon administration, and the effusive praise he had heaped on the president, had irredeemably tarnished him in the eyes of some. '[I]t does seem to me', wrote Joseph Rauh, civil rights lawyer and founder member of Americans for Democratic Action, to Moynihan, 'that you forfeited your right to Democratic support when you continued to laud President Nixon at a time when it was difficult for anyone . . . not to know Nixon was involved in an illegal cover-up'.³⁵ 'Will we ever be free of the Moynihan phenomenon?' lamented a *Nation* editorial in February. '[I]s it possible still to think of this ponderous lightweight as a Democrat?'³⁶

Moynihan's previous remarks on the subject of race were likewise an albatross about his neck. Representatives Charles Rangel and Shirley Chisholm, two of New York's most respected black leaders, publicly expressed their opposition to Moynihan's candidacy. Rangel personally telephoned key Democrats across the state to register his objections. In mid-February, the State Council of Black Elected Officials voted to declare Moynihan an unacceptable candidate.³⁷ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported that New York's Democratic governor, Hugh Carey, could not support Moynihan without 'a clean bill of health . . . from New York's black political leaders'. The influence of the state's black political leadership on their constituency is debatable – a *Daily News* poll showed 42 per cent of black voters in New York wanted Moynihan to enter the race, as opposed to only 15 per cent who did not – but their opposition could act as a veto on any aspirant candidacy.³⁸

However, Moynihan had barely announced his departure from the UN before prominent New York Democrats began to approach him. Ed Koch, for instance, Democratic congressman and shortly to become New York City's mayor, wrote urging Moynihan to enter the race.³⁹ Moynihan's most aggressive courter was Joseph F. Crangle, the Democratic leader of upstate Erie County and former chairman of the state party. At a dinner which Crangle organized at the Carlisle Hotel, he made his most candid plea to the wavering Moynihan.

³⁴ William Claibourne, 'Moynihan "open" to Senate race', *WP*, 4 Feb. 1976.

³⁵ Letter, Rauh to DPM, undated, papers of Joseph L. Rauh, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, box 3.

³⁶ 'Final(?) questions on Moynihan', *Nation*, 14 Feb. 1976.

³⁷ Frank Lynn, 'Black politicians oppose Moynihan', *NYT*, 18 Feb. 1976.

³⁸ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, 'Obstacles for Moynihan', *WP*, 2 Mar. 1976; Carl Gersham, 'Blacks and Daniel P. Moynihan: a bum rap?' *New Republic*, 10 Apr. 1976.

³⁹ Letter, Edward I. Koch to DPM, 14 Jan. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 383.

The state party, lamented Crangle, was being 'Manhattanized' and only Moynihan could wrest it back.⁴⁰

Moynihan could also count on two crucial blocs as the bedrock of his coalition: organized labour and New York's Jewish community. Both Lane Kirkland, secretary-treasurer of the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations) and Al Barkan, the head of the AFL-CIO's political action committee, gave Moynihan private undertakings that, were he to join the race, he could expect \$100,000 in union contributions.⁴¹ Kirkland went further when, at the annual dinner for Social Democrats USA, he called on Moynihan 'to sally forth from the halls of academia and offer your services to the people of the great state of New York'. Pledges of support came from other union leaders, most notably Albert Shanker, the pugnacious head of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT).⁴² Jewish voters, though only 12 per cent of New York State's population, made up almost one third of the Democratic primary electorate. Moynihan's vigorous defence of Israel at the UN meant that he could expect considerable goodwill from them. A *Daily News* poll of 'New York area residents', taken in February 1976, showed that support for Moynihan's actions in the UN stood at 78 per cent among Jewish respondents, 60 per cent of whom favoured his entry into the race.⁴³

Moynihan's principal opponent in the primary would be Bella Abzug.⁴⁴ A native New Yorker, Abzug started out as a lawyer; her early cases included defending civil rights activists in the Deep South. She was one of the few women in her profession when she began practising in the 1940s and, to ensure that she would not be mistaken for a secretary, she took to wearing large, wide-brimmed hats, an affectation that would become a political trademark. In 1970, she won a congressional seat on Manhattan's solidly liberal West Side, defeating a seven-term incumbent in the Democratic primary. 'A Woman's Place is in the House', ran her campaign slogan, 'And the Senate'.⁴⁵ A champion of the Equal Rights Amendment and a fierce opponent of the Vietnam War, Abzug's uncompromising liberalism won her a spot on Richard Nixon's enemies list. 'The adjective *flamboyant* was attached to her almost as stock epithets were given

⁴⁰ Letter, Crangle to DPM, 18 Feb. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 383; 'Moynihan is open to a Senate race', *NYT*, 3 Feb. 1976.

⁴¹ Ken Bode and William Straus, 'The New York Senate race: five is a crowd', *New Republic*, 21-8 Aug. 1976. ⁴² 'A.F. L.-C.I. O. aide backs Moynihan', *NYT*, 25 Mar. 1976.

⁴³ 'Moynihan for Senate run favored', *Daily News*, 1 Mar. 1976, clipping in the papers of Norman Podhoretz, Manuscript Reading Room, Library of Congress, box 2.

⁴⁴ The other candidates in the race included Paul O'Dwyer, a lawyer who had established his progressive bona fides defending striking workers and civil rights activists, and who was on his fourth bid for a Senate seat; Ramsey Clark, US attorney-general under Lyndon Johnson, who had pulled off an upset victory in the 1974 Democratic Senate primary, losing to Senator Jacob Javits in November; and Abraham Hirschfield, a businessman who had made millions constructing parking garages. None of these candidates proved able to disrupt the Moynihan-Abzug duel, however.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Soffer, *Ed Koch and the rebuilding of New York City* (New York, NY, 2010), p. 98.

to Homer's heroes', wrote Godfrey Hodgson. 'She was loud, rude and proud of it.'⁴⁶

When Crangle complained of the 'Manhattanization' of the state party, it was Abzug and her ilk that he had in mind. A primary campaign with Abzug and Moynihan as principal contenders would be a microcosm of the larger struggle then raging through the Democratic party. Each served as the avatars of competing factions then engaged in tug-of-war for the party's future. Abzug had credibility with liberals that Moynihan could only dream of, but lacked his appeal to centrist and conservative Democrats. Abzug's press secretary recalled that when she campaigned in conservative upstate counties, she 'did the best when she was regarded as a celebrity and a strong leader, because when it got down to specific issues, they didn't agree with her on a lot of things'.⁴⁷ A forceful personality, inviting devotion and revulsion in equal measure, Abzug was someone against whom centrist politicians could define a distinctive political identity.

III

'In a transport, possibly, of Bicentennial excess', wrote Moynihan some months later, 'I ran in five elections during 1976.'⁴⁸ His first foray into electoral politics that year was not on his own behalf but as part of Washington senator Henry M. 'Scoop' Jackson's presidential campaign. A doughty anti-communist and unreconstructed New Dealer, Jackson was the darling of the old guard Democrats. Jackson had made an undistinguished bid for the presidency in 1972, and had devoted the intervening years to husbanding his national profile, establishing himself as a champion of environmentalism and a vocal opponent of détente with the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ Moynihan was a late addition to Jackson's New York delegation, representing the heavily Jewish 22nd congressional district in the Bronx. Moynihan also campaigned in Massachusetts (where Jackson pulled off a remarkable upset victory), and then in Florida in the hopes of drawing Jewish support to Jackson. Jackson, in turn, frequently touted Moynihan as a potential secretary of state.

⁴⁶ Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ Suzanne Braun Levine and Mary Thom, *Bella Abzug: how one tough broad from the Bronx fought Jim Crow and Joe McCarthy, pissed off Jimmy Carter, battled for the rights of women and workers, rallied against war and for the planet, and shook up politics along the way* (New York, NY, 2007), p. 171.

⁴⁸ Alongside his campaigns as a Jackson delegate, in the Democratic senatorial primary, and in the Senate election itself, Moynihan also 'ran' for a place on the Convention's Platform Committee and then membership of the drafting committee for the party's platform. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, 'The liberal's dilemma', *New Republic*, 22 Jan. 1977.

⁴⁹ Robert G. Kaufman, *Henry M. Jackson* (Seattle, WA. and London, 2000), pp. 315, 332; Jeff Bloodworth, 'Senator Henry Jackson, the Solzhenitsyn affair, and American liberalism', *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (spring 2006), pp. 69–77.

In the presidential primary, Moynihan ran well ahead of Jackson in his district and, apparently emboldened by this demonstration of his appeal, on 10 June, he finally committed himself to the race.⁵⁰ Standing with Moynihan at his campaign announcement press conference were Crangle, Ray Corbett, the head of the New York State AFL-CIO, and, more significantly given the candidate's troubled history on matters of race, the black leaders Bayard Rustin and Bernard Gifford. Indeed when the press conference started, Gifford was standing at the back of the room, and Moynihan made a point of calling him to the front.⁵¹

By the end of June, Crangle had drafted Meyer 'Sandy' Frucher to serve as campaign manager. Frucher, a young Harvard-educated political operative who had worked for Eugene McCarthy's presidential campaign, was thought to be a suitably high-profile sop to Moynihan's liberal critics. Fearing that the campaign would be undermined if the candidate found himself on the wrong side of a liberal vs. conservative primary fight, Frucher sought to downplay ideological differences between Moynihan and his rivals. 'There are no issues of substance in this campaign', he told the *New Republic*, 'the only issue is the character of the candidates and in both cases that is pretty well defined'.⁵² This certainly seemed to be borne out by Moynihan's first advertisement, which would become intrinsic to the campaign's iconography. The ad, designed by Moynihan himself, utilized a photograph of the former ambassador voting at the UN, one arm aloft and face set in grim determination, under the bullish slogan, 'He Spoke Up For America . . . He'll Speak Up For New York State'.⁵³

Nonetheless, Moynihan's campaign did rest on more substantive foundations and, on 25 August, at the Isaiah Wall in Ralph Bunche Park opposite the UN headquarters, Moynihan delivered the first of four speeches that were to form the intellectual underpinnings of his campaign.⁵⁴ This first address, 'A Nation Worth Defending', outlined the foreign policy Moynihan intended to champion in the Senate, essentially a restatement of the principles that had defined his time as UN ambassador. He had arrived at the UN, Moynihan told his audience, 'to make the American case' at a time when discussion of the United States' international role was increasingly dominated by those voices contending 'that we are so immoral a nation that the best thing we can do for the rest of the world is withdraw and concentrate all our attention on cleansing

⁵⁰ R. W. Apple, Jr, 'Moynihan tests political winds', *NYT*, 5 Apr. 1976; Schoen, *Pat*, p. 248.

⁵¹ Headline: 'Moynihan', *ABC News*, 10 June 1976, Vanderbilt Television News Archive (VTNA), <http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>; William Claiborne, 'Moynihan enters New York Senate race', *WP*, 11 June 1976; Schoen, *Pat*, p. 251.

⁵² Schoen, *Pat*, pp. 250, 253–4; Bode and Straus, 'The New York Senate race'.

⁵³ Moynihan for Senate ad, *NYT*, 27 June 1976; Schoen, *Pat*, p. 254.

⁵⁴ The note to editors and correspondents attached to this first speech, from communications director Richard T. Stout, announced that the four upcoming statements would 'form the centerpiece of [Moynihan's] campaign'. Richard T. Stout, 'Note to editors and correspondents', 25 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 493.

ourselves of sin'. The truth, said Moynihan, was that if the United States were to withdraw from the world, democracy itself – already embattled – would face the threat of extinction. While the United States has dithered, 'the totalitarian world has been moving forward aggressively'. Only a 'strong and resolute America' could stand against the totalitarian threat.⁵⁵

With his next statement, 'New York State and the Liberal Tradition', delivered three days after the first, Moynihan positioned himself as the inheritor of 'the great tradition of our party in this State'. This tradition was, at root, 'an idea and a style of reformist liberalism'. It had defined New York's Democratic party for the first half of the twentieth century and was predicated on the idea that the 'American political system is sound and healthy at its foundations, and that the object of all reform is to improve the system'. In recent years, however, this tradition had fallen prey to 'usurpers who have made off with [liberalism's] banner and corrupted its language'. Their 'so-called liberalism' proceeded from the belief 'that the American political system is sick and that only radical surgery can save it, if indeed it can be saved at all'.⁵⁶ Moynihan contrasted his own moderation with what he characterized as Abzug's unreasonable ideological purism. 'I stand for the liberalism of Al Smith and the Democratic party tradition that says never promise anything you can't deliver.'⁵⁷

Five days later, Moynihan brought the lens closer to home with his third speech, 'Saving New York City'. At the heart of this statement was a defence of the 'despised "regulars"' from the myopic assaults of party reformers. Whereas the regulars had built a party that accommodated 'the needs and wishes of a racially and ethnically and religiously variegated constituency', the reformers set up federal agencies that dealt with people as members of a demarcated ethnic, racial, or religious group. This was, said Moynihan, a politics that did not alleviate discrimination but merely shifted the burden from one group to another. 'I oppose the politics of racial polarization and reverse discrimination', he declared. The new generation of New York politicians had turned the city into a place where only the very rich or very poor had incentives to live. The result had been a mass exodus to the suburbs, depriving the city not only of their tax contributions and productive energies, but also their 'stabilizing influencing [sic] on the fevered urban atmosphere'. New York City, he concluded, deserved to be rejuvenated not because 'it is a charity case in need of compassion' but because 'it has been, and can continue to be, a source of riches of many different kinds to itself and to the rest of the country'.⁵⁸

With his final speech, 'In Defense of the Family', Moynihan brought the focus down to one of the society's smallest units. 'More than ever before in living

⁵⁵ DPM, 'A nation worth defending', 25 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 493.

⁵⁶ DPM, 'New York State and the liberal tradition', 28 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 493.

⁵⁷ Press release, 'Moynihan criticizes Abzug house votes', 27 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 384. ⁵⁸ DPM, 'Saving New York City', 30 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 493.

memory, or perhaps in the entire history of this country', he said, 'the family is under siege.' The biggest contributor to family breakdown was an ineptly constructed welfare system. This was a dragon that Moynihan had been itching to slay since the 1965 report. It was not merely that welfare, as constructed, did not support family coherence; it actively encouraged disintegration.⁵⁹ He blamed 'a certain kind of "liberal" ... [who] would rather protect what he considers the good name of the poor than do something about poverty'. The solution was to federalize the welfare system, transferring costs that crippled New York State to the national government. He had come close to achieving this aim, he claimed, with the Family Assistance Plan, and it was clear, in his frequent denunciations of Abzug's anti-FAP votes, that the defeat still rankled.⁶⁰

This quartet offered a vision of liberalism that he had been defining and defending throughout his career in public life: patriotic, internationalist, and anti-communist in foreign policy, favouring universalism over identity politics, sensitive to the concerns of blue-collar voters, wary of reforms that weakened a party's ability to deliver for its constituents, and which situated itself within the liberal tradition of New York, the state that had given birth to the New Deal. Ideologically, Moynihan's campaign rested on these four pillars. Psephologically, Moynihan's campaign was grounded in two electoral blocs: Jewish voters and organized labour.

Before Moynihan had entered the race, Abzug was publicly sanguine about his prospects. 'He's an easy opponent', she told the *New York Times*. 'He has so many liabilities – kowtowing to Nixon, insensitivity to minorities, his showboating at the U.N.'⁶¹ This assessment underestimated Moynihan's considerable strengths. New York's Jewish voters, in particular, embraced Moynihan for his 'showboating' as UN ambassador. In light of the makeup of New York's Democratic electorate, it was hardly surprising that Israel was, according to one reporter, the issue that cropped up most frequently in the candidates' joint appearances, press releases, and campaign literature. All candidates expressed their fervent support for Israel, but Moynihan sought to distinguish himself with a more bullish posture on defence policy, accusing Abzug of voting against the sale of Phantom jets to Israel.⁶² Over the 4 July holiday weekend, Moynihan travelled to Jerusalem to receive an honorary degree from Hebrew University. By chance, his visit coincided with Operation Entebbe, an Israeli raid on the Ugandan airport where Palestinian and German terrorists were holding 106 hostages (almost exclusively Israeli) after hijacking an Air France flight. Upon his return to New York, Moynihan held a press conference defending Israel's actions and calling upon the US government to recognize their legitimacy.

⁵⁹ DPM, 'In defense of the family', 1 Sept. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 393.

⁶⁰ Press release, 'Moynihan criticizes Abzug house votes'.

⁶¹ Maurice Carroll, 'Aspirants for the Senate profess little concern about Moynihan', *NYT*, 4 Feb. 1976.

⁶² Frank Lynn, 'Democrats in Senate race wooing New York's Jews', *NYT*, 9 Aug. 1976.

He followed this up with an article for *New York* magazine in which he reaffirmed that Israel had become 'a metaphor for democracy'. By standing with Israel, Moynihan wrote, the US demonstrated its own commitment to democratic principles.⁶³

Weeks after the Entebbe raid, campaigning in the predominantly Jewish diamond-and-jewellery district stretching along part of 47th Avenue, reported *The Times*, Moynihan was 'treated like a hero'. He was repeatedly buttonholed by passers-by and thanked for his support for Israel. In what was supposed to be a brief meet-and-greet prior to a campaign speech, the candidate succeeded in covering fifty yards in forty-five minutes.⁶⁴ In an effort to dampen Moynihan's appeal, Abzug's staff cited her long-standing commitment to Israel (she had joined a Zionist youth group, Hashomir Hatzair, at age twelve) compared to her opponent's late arrival. 'Two speeches do not a Zionist make', Abzug's campaign manager told reporters.⁶⁵ Yet, to the chagrin of the Abzug campaign, Moynihan's noisy conversion to the cause seemed to trump Abzug's own Jewishness and her lifelong Zionism among the state's Jewish voters.

Moynihan's support among labour unions was similarly robust. In late July, Ray Corbett announced the formation of a committee of some seventy labour leaders in support of Moynihan's campaign. Among them was Al Shanker, Sol C. Chaikin, president of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, and A. Philip Randolph, international president emeritus of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the first African-American trade union to be chartered by the AFL, who was made honorary chairman.⁶⁶ Moynihan was, said Corbett, 'a down-to-earth, common-sense, straightforward sort', 'deeply concerned with the problems of the ordinary citizen and worker', and the only Democrat who could defeat Buckley in the autumn. Particular support came from Al Shanker and members of the AFT. At the state AFL-CIO convention in early September, at which Moynihan delivered a thunderously received address, AFT members took to singing a 'Bye, Bye Bella', a reworking of the popular standard 'Bye, Bye Blackbird'. At the same convention, Shanker denounced Abzug from the platform, accusing her of having crossed picket lines.⁶⁷ A Cold War liberal of impeccable pedigree, Shanker had risen to prominence through his opposition to community-control reforms in teaching districts, particularly during the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike. To New Politics liberals, Shanker was the embodiment of the parochial racism endemic within labour unions. He was

⁶³ Moynihan for Senate press release, 'Moynihan urges international anti-terrorist campaign', 7 July 1976; DPM papers, part 1, box 384; DPM, 'The totalitarian terrorists', *New York*, 26 July 1976, offprint in the DPM papers, part 1, box 221.

⁶⁴ Thomas P. Ronan, 'Moynihan is a sparkler on diamond district visit', *NYT*, 17 July 1976.

⁶⁵ Lynn, 'Democrats in Senate race wooing New York's Jews'.

⁶⁶ Thomas P. Ronan, 'Labor leaders form a group to elect Moynihan', *NYT*, 22 July 1976.

⁶⁷ Damon Stetson, 'Shanker assails Mrs. Abzug; she denies his scab charge', *NYT*, 3 Sept. 1976.

also, according to labour reporter A. H. Haskin, 'the darling of New York's battered middle class'.⁶⁸

It was to that battered middle class that Moynihan appealed. One Saturday morning in mid-August, Moynihan attended a fundraiser – described by the host as an 'unradical, unchic brunch bash' – at the Brooklyn home of retired cop and taxi driver, James Beatrice. 'Honored guests' included 'many of Mr. Beatrice's neighbors and friends, including John Jenkow, mechanic; Joe Subbiondo, who works with engines; Louis Fasullo, who has a law degree; [and] Pat Rea, who is in buses'.⁶⁹ Moynihan, the former shoeshine boy and longshoreman, campaigned as the champion of blue-collar ethnic voters who feared their material prosperity was threatened by Abzug's New Politics liberalism. Abzug tried to fight back. In August, a group of forty union leaders established a committee in support of Bella Abzug to rebut the general assumption that Moynihan could count on labour's support. Jan Pierce, chair of the Abzug Labor Committee and assistant vice president of the Communication Workers of America, said that 'The leaders of some unions feel very comfortable with Mr. Moynihan, but I don't know how the rank-and-file union members will feel about a scholar who served both Nixon and Ford'.⁷⁰

Ultimately, it was this focus on Moynihan's supposed apostasy that would prove the undoing of Bella's campaign. Two weeks before the primary, it led Abzug into a stumble that tarnished her efforts to renovate her controversial public image. While campaigning at the Dutchess County Fair, Abzug was asked whether, in the event of her defeat, she would support Moynihan in the general election. 'No', she replied. She would not, she said, support someone who would continue 'Nixon–Ford policies'. Moynihan fired back that Abzug's stance represented a 'corruption of liberalism' shared by 'those elements in our party that prefer to ruin if they cannot rule'.⁷¹ Thirty-three upstate Democratic leaders wrote to Abzug urging her, without success, to reverse her position.⁷²

The primary's decisive moment came a few days before the vote, when the *New York Times* announced its endorsement. The editor of *The Times's* editorial page, John Oakes, was an Abzug supporter, and Abzug's press secretary recalled that the editorial board had already voted, by eleven members to two,

⁶⁸ 'A.F.L.-C.I.O. aide backs Moynihan', *NYT*, 25 Mar. 1976; A. H. Ruskin, 'Shanker's great leap', *NYT*, 9 Sept. 1973. For more on Shanker, see Richard D. Kahlenberg's superb biography *Tough liberal: Albert Shanker and the battles over schools, unions, race, and democracy* (New York, NY, 2007).

⁶⁹ Press release, 'Unradical, unchic Brooklyn brunch bash for Moynihan', 13 Aug. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 492.

⁷⁰ Ronald Smothers, 'Abzug Labor Panel', *NYT*, 25 Aug. 1976.

⁷¹ 'Mrs. Abzug says she won't back Moynihan if he wins primary', *NYT*, 29 Aug. 1976; 'Moynihan accuses Abzug of "Rule-or-Ruin" stance', *NYT*, 30 Aug. 1976.

⁷² Twenty-six of the signatories were Moynihan supporters, six were uncommitted, and one had endorsed Abzug. Ronald Smothers, 'Mrs. Abzug urged to retract repudiation of Moynihan', *NYT*, 1 Sept. 1976.

to endorse Abzug.⁷³ However, publisher Arthur Ochs 'Punch' Sulzberger, a personal friend of Moynihan, overrode the board and published an editorial endorsing him. A furious Oakes was allowed only a one line missive in next day's 'Letters to the Editor' page to protest.⁷⁴ The editorial offered Moynihan absolution. It lamented his 'unfortunate – and undeserved – unpopularity among black citizens' and dismissed his praise of Nixon and vociferous defence of Israel as the 'excesses of a passionate public servant whose motives and intellect we nonetheless admire'. Moynihan took to carrying a clipping of the editorial to campaign events, brandishing it like an amulet as he reiterated his liberal bona fides. Moynihan also won the endorsement of the conservative *Daily News*, whose heavily Catholic readership was concentrated in the boroughs outside Manhattan. *The Times* and the *News* rarely endorsed the same candidate, and so winning both was a coup. Douglas Ireland, Abzug's campaign manager, believed that her refusal to endorse Moynihan in the event of his victory prompted Sulzberger's intervention. 'That endorsement', he reflected, 'was worth a good five points in New York City and in the suburbs.'⁷⁵

On primary day, 15 September, Moynihan beat Abzug by 10,000 votes, a razor thin margin of 0.10 per cent. Moynihan carried most of New York City, and its suburbs, as well as upstate New York. He swept Catholic and Jewish voters. Abzug carried Manhattan, the Bronx, and some upstate areas, and, a potentially troubling omen, trounced Moynihan among blacks and Puerto Rican voters.⁷⁶ The next day, at a press conference at his campaign headquarters – which reeked of ammonia, having been scrubbed clean following victory celebrations – Moynihan announced grandly, 'I believe we are seeing a rebirth of the Democratic majority in New York'. One journalist asked whether he would be taking steps to make peace with the liberals. 'We were the liberals in the race', replied the presumptive nominee with a grin.⁷⁷

IV

Narrowly backed by his party, Moynihan had to turn his attention to unseating Buckley. On foreign affairs, little separated the two. Both were unimpeachable anti-communists, all but inflexible on the defence budget, and stoutly pro-Israel. Thus, the election quickly became a clash of domestic ideologies, with Moynihan emerging as a more conventional liberal Democrat and the campaign becoming a fight over the proper role of government in American life. Indeed, on the CBS evening news, anchor Walter Cronkite observed that

⁷³ Levine and Thom, *Bella Abzug*, p. 178.

⁷⁴ Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, pp. 268–70; 'Moynihan for Senate', *NYT*, 10 Sept. 1976; letters to the editor, *NYT*, 11 Sept. 1976.

⁷⁵ Levine and Thom, *Bella Abzug*, p. 176.

⁷⁶ Schoen, *Pat*, pp. 256–7.

⁷⁷ Maurice Carroll, 'Mrs. Abzug offers to aid winner; Buckley calls Moynihan "to the left"', *NYT*, 16 Sept. 1976.

the New York Senate race 'may offer the most striking example of a clash between the political right and the left'.⁷⁸

Buckley, charged Moynihan, was 'a radical of the Right' who had never reconciled himself to the New Deal. 'My opponent keeps saying he wants to get Washington off our backs', Moynihan told one labour group. 'I say I want to get Washington on our side.' Buckley, said Moynihan, was 'an eccentricity that New Yorkers can ill afford in the United States Senate'.⁷⁹ Buckley, an underdog throughout the campaign, was no less harsh. There was, Buckley told an audience in conservative upstate New York, little difference between Moynihan and the 'undiluted liberals' he had defeated in the primary. Moynihan had revealed his true colours through his role in drafting the 'pie-in-the-sky liberal fraud' that made up the party's national platform.⁸⁰ Hoping to exploit a vein of anti-elitism, Buckley took to referring to his opponent as the 'professor' and accused Moynihan of 'run[ning] around with the London School of Economics' Left-wing gurus'.⁸¹

The most influential issue in the Buckley–Moynihan contest, however, was NYC's continued economic weakness, and the extension of federally backed loans to keep the city solvent. Approximately 40 per cent of New York State's total electorate, after all, was the city vote, and the consequences of a municipal bankruptcy would ripple throughout the state and the nation. This dispute revealed the fundamental ideological cleavage between Buckley and Moynihan over the role of the federal government in American life. A *National Review* profile explained that Senator Buckley was driven 'by the conviction that those conservative principles for which he stands, and for which there are fewer and fewer spokesmen of national stature, are essential as a counterforce against an increasingly dominant philosophy of governmental intervention'.⁸² Despite his opposition to any federal role in a municipal rescue package, Buckley was unable to offer much of an alternative. There was simply no private source, or coalition of private sources, that could convincingly replace the federal government. 'That was how I got elected', Moynihan later recalled.⁸³

Barring a self-destructive outburst by Moynihan, Buckley's best chance for victory would be to exploit, or hope for the exacerbation of, fissures in the Democratic party's coalition, winning a plurality in another split field. It seemed for a time that this might be a distinct possibility, when the Liberal party wavered

⁷⁸ Headline: 'Campaign 1976/Senate elections/New York race', *CBS News Report*, 18 Oct. 1976, VTNA.

⁷⁹ Albert R. Hunt, 'In this Senate race, one campaign issue is FDR's "New Deal"', *Wall Street Journal (WSJ)*, 15 Oct. 1976; Schoen, *Pat*, 260; headline: 'Campaign 1976/New York Senate race/Moynihan/Buckley', *ABC News Report*, 14 Oct. 1976, VTNA.

⁸⁰ Frank Lynn, 'The Moynihan–Buckley race: breeding gives way to brawling', *NYT*, 29 Oct. 1976; Ronald Smothers, 'Buckley, campaigning in heavily Republican area, labels Moynihan "undiluted liberal"', *NYT*, 21 Oct. 1976.

⁸¹ Jane Rosen, 'Why Moynihan may thank his old enemies', *Guardian*, 27 Oct. 1976.

⁸² Patricia S. Coyne, 'A Conservative senator in New York', *National Review*, 29 Oct. 1976.

⁸³ Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, p. 272.

over whether to endorse Moynihan. Concerned about his supposed conservatism, the party made unsuccessful overtures to Bella Abzug and John Lindsay. Abzug declined because the approach was made two weeks after the primary. The moment had passed; had she been sounded out earlier, she said, she likely would have accepted.⁸⁴ Eventually a personal appeal from Governor Hugh Carey to the Liberal party's Policy Committee secured its support. The election would be a straight left–right fight: a Democratic–Liberal candidate versus a Republican–Conservative.

Suspicion in New York's black communities remained a problem for Moynihan that could have redounded to Buckley's favour. In October, the eminent black sociologist Dr Kenneth Clark released a statement to the *New York Amsterdam News*, one of the largest circulation African-American newspapers in the state, endorsing Buckley, less out of love for the incumbent than contempt for Moynihan. Though he 'rarely agreed' with the conservative Senator Buckley, wrote Clark, he remained preferable to Moynihan who 'would, as Senator, oppose the legitimate interests and aspirations of my people and would not serve the basic human and democratic interests of the people of New York State'.⁸⁵ Clark's public disavowal was all the more wounding because he had been a leading defender of Moynihan during the *Negro family* controversy.⁸⁶

As election day neared, Buckley's chances of another upset dwindled. Moynihan maintained a healthy poll lead that the incumbent senator was unable to overcome. Moynihan was also fortunate that the usually fratricidal Democrats, scenting victory, began to coalesce around his candidacy. The *New Republic* headlined its bullish endorsement 'Pat Moynihan, Liberal'.⁸⁷ A few holdouts aside, Moynihan was even able to win some high-level black support. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, who had initially opposed Moynihan's candidacy, endorsed him in late October, acknowledging that while Moynihan had been 'controversial' he was nonetheless 'the kind of fighter who will not give up'.⁸⁸ Even the *Amsterdam News*, which had previously denounced his candidacy as totally unacceptable, reluctantly endorsed Moynihan a week before the election.⁸⁹

The final result was not even close. Moynihan won a decisive victory, with 2,913,200 votes to Buckley's 2,517,292 (54.1 to 44.9 per cent). He ran best in Jewish and Catholic districts – retaining many of those ethnic, blue-collar, and traditionally Democratic, voters who would defect to Reagan in 1980 – but ran behind Jimmy Carter in black districts. Statewide, Moynihan ran approximately 33,000 votes ahead of Carter. This was by no means a unique occurrence in the

⁸⁴ Schoen, *Pat*, p. 258; Levine and Thom, *Bella Abzug*, p. 182.

⁸⁵ 'Dr. Kenneth Clark blasts Moynihan – backs Buckley', *New York Amsterdam News (NYAN)*, 16 Oct. 1976.

⁸⁶ Hodgson, *Gentleman from New York*, p. 266.

⁸⁷ 'Pat Moynihan, liberal', *New Republic*, 30 Oct. 1976.

⁸⁸ Press release, statement by Rep. Shirley Chisholm endorsing Moynihan, 26 Oct. 1976, DPM papers, part 1, box 489.

⁸⁹ 'A difficult decision', *NYAN*, 30 Oct. 1976.

industrial Northeast and Midwest, where Carter was the beneficiary of a reverse coattails effect and formidable union mobilization.⁹⁰ Moynihan was only one of a group of Northeastern and Midwestern Democrats who felt they did not owe their victories to the president.

V

The crowd gathered at the Moynihan campaign headquarters on election night was so dense that it took the candidate some ten minutes to make his way to the platform to deliver his victory speech. 'New York was on the ballot tonight', Moynihan told the throng, 'and New York won'.⁹¹ However, Moynihan's victory had consequences that extended beyond the Empire State. He had won the nomination of his party by a breathtakingly slender margin. Two of the other contenders, Ramsey Clark and Paul O'Dwyer, had received 10 and 9 per cent respectively. Had either withdrawn, Abzug almost certainly would have faced Buckley in the autumn.⁹² The outcome of that match-up, Moynihan and his backers were in no doubt, would have been a victory for Buckley and perhaps even Ford. Moreover, Moynihan had beaten Buckley by pulling together the strands of the fraying New Deal coalition. His continued weakness among blacks and some liberals was worrying, but his candidacy had enticed back once solid Democratic blocs that had begun defecting to the Republican party, most notably blue-collar and Catholic voters, and reincorporated trade union leadership who felt increasingly excluded from the party structures.

Elections are not always ideal arenas for the formulation of coherent ideologies, as intellectual rigour is often subordinated to the need to make targeted appeals to various constituencies. However, it seems clear that Moynihan was using his Senate race to define a new 'vital center' liberalism for the Democratic party against the twin poles of the New Politics and the New Right, as represented by Abzug and Buckley. This liberalism would be anti-communist and ostentatiously patriotic, opposed to identity politics, sensitive to the economic anxieties of the party's working-class base, and with a sincere if circumspect commitment to federal activism. 'I ran', Moynihan wrote later, 'as a liberal willing to be critical of what liberals had done.'⁹³

Following the disappointments of Hubert Humphrey's and Henry Jackson's presidential campaigns, the Coalition for a Democratic Majority could now convincingly claim that it was capable of assembling that majority—among a broader electorate if not yet within the party. A month earlier, Joseph Crangle had predicted that Moynihan's election 'would place the moderate-center

⁹⁰ Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy vs. Carter: the 1980 battle for the Democratic party's soul* (Lawrence, KS, 2010), pp. 29–30; *CQ: guide to U. S. elections* (6th edn, Washington, DC, 2010), 1–11, pp. 793, 1457.

⁹¹ Maurice Carroll, 'Moynihan defeats Buckley for New York Senate seat', *NYT*, 3 Nov. 1976.

⁹² Levine and Thom, *Bella Abzug*, p. 176.

⁹³ Moynihan, 'The liberals' dilemma', *New Republic*, 22 Jan. 1977.

philosophy in the forefront of the national Democratic party.⁹⁴ Once in Congress, New York's junior senator became the focal point around which disaffected 'vital center' Democrats congregated. 'I hoped', recalled Norman Podhoretz, 'we could define the term "Moynihan Democrat".⁹⁵ In advance of the 1980 election, these Democrats – disillusioned with President Jimmy Carter – began to urge him to enter the Democratic primaries.⁹⁶ The *Nation* was sufficiently disquieted by Moynihan's growing prominence to devote a special issue to debunking him, under the front page headline, 'The conscience of a neoconservative'.⁹⁷

The Moynihan presidential campaign never materialized, however. By the early 1980s, Moynihan had emerged as a leading critic of the Reagan administration, particularly on the issue of welfare reform, which he argued would unfairly disadvantage his state. From then, he began to be more frequently identified as one of a cadre of 'liberals from the Northeast'.⁹⁸ The CDM's most enduring legacy was its afterlife as the model for the Democratic Leadership Council (DLC), the caucus formed soon after Walter Mondale's landslide defeat in 1984.⁹⁹ The DLC was to enjoy considerably more success, propelling one of its own, Arkansas governor Bill Clinton, into the White House in 1992.

Nonetheless, Moynihan's first senate campaign complicates our understanding of the 1970s as a decade of liberal decline and conservative triumph. It should likewise prompt a re-evaluation of narratives of the post-1960s Democratic party in which the ascent of middle-class New Politics liberals, whose rejection of class-based pocketbook issues for the politics of identity, drive neoconservative Democrats, already disillusioned and set on a rightward trajectory, along with a once-reliable blue-collar constituency, into Reagan's big tent. Such narratives do not account for the experiences of Democrats like Moynihan who would have found the GOP a most uncongenial home, in spite of ongoing disagreements with members of their own tribe. Many of these politicians were, in their own minds, less neoconservatives than paleoliberals.

Throughout his senatorial career, Moynihan never surrendered to the 'neoconservative' label, intermittently writing to journalists and editors to object to its use in connection with his name. In 1979, to take one example, he wrote to Peter Steinfelds, of *Esquire* magazine, protesting its use in a recent profile. The result of this mischaracterization, wrote Moynihan with typical modesty, would be that a 'good many persons of open mind and friendly mien will simply learn that the smartest people these days are something called neo-conservatives, and adapt their own disposition accordingly. Is it a service to

⁹⁴ Hunt, 'In this Senate race, one campaign issue is FDR's "New Deal"'.
⁹⁵ Morton Kondracke, 'The Moynihan movement', *New Republic*, 22 July 1978.
⁹⁶ *Ibid.*; William F. Buckley, 'Why not Moynihan?' *National Review*, 22 Feb. 1979.
⁹⁷ *Nation*, 22 Sept. 1979.
⁹⁸ Steven V. Roberts, 'Democrats assail Reagan's Tax Bill', *NYT*, 28 July 1981.
⁹⁹ Kenneth Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: the politics of liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence, KS, 2000), pp. 31–2, 60.

liberalism to encourage this?’ The so-called ‘neo-conservatives’ were, he continued, ‘liberals much as John F. Kennedy was a liberal. A bit more so.’¹⁰⁰ In 1984, Michael Harrington – the coiner of ‘neoconservative’ and then convener of the American Solidarity Movement – wrote to Moynihan to request his signature on an ad shortly to appear in the *New York Times* protesting ‘Ronald Reagan’s increasingly anti-union America’. Moynihan declined to sign the ad, but circulated copies among his friends. ‘A neo-conservative no more!’ exulted his cover letter.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Letter, DPM to Peter Steinfeld, 20 Feb. 1979, DPM papers, part II, box 1.

¹⁰¹ Letters, DPM to Bill Kovach, Daniel Bell, James Q. Wilson, Irving Kristol, and Nathan Glazer, 25 Feb. 1984. Enc. letter, Michael Harrington to DPM, 31 Jan. 1984, DPM papers, part II, box 8; solidarity ad, *NYT*, 18. Mar. 1984.