

By John B. Judis

WASHINGTON

THE STRUGGLES SPURRED BY THE SUPREME Court's 1954 school desegregation decision, *Brown vs. Board of Education*, dominated American politics for the next two decades. Now the court's July 3 decision to weaken its historic 1973 ruling that affirmed abortion rights, *Roe vs. Wade*, threatens to make abortion an over-riding political issue of the '90s.

Since 1978, New Right candidates have been using abortion to attract Catholic and fundamentalist Democrats. But the court's ruling in *Webster vs. Reproductive Health Services* has mobilized proponents as well as opponents of abortion rights (see story on page 6). In upcoming governors' races in 1989 and 1990, the pro-choice movement is beginning to play the same ruthless game of single-issue politics that abortion opponents had previously played.

The question is whether liberals or conservatives, Democrats or Republicans, will benefit by this increased attention to abortion. There's little doubt that from *Roe vs. Wade* to *Webster* the Republicans have come out ahead on the abortion issue. But Democrats and liberals could emerge victorious in the forthcoming civil war over reproductive rights.

Restricted abortion rights: Opinion polls on abortion reveal contradictory sentiments among Americans. In a recent survey, conducted this spring by the *Los Angeles Times*, 61 percent of the respondents thought abortion was "morally wrong," 57 percent believed it was "murder" and 57 percent (vs. 34 percent) opposed women being able to get an abortion "no matter what the reason." But 62 percent opposed a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion. And according to a *Time-CNN* poll, 57 percent of Americans don't think the Supreme Court should overturn the *Roe vs. Wade* decision.

What these kind of surveys reveal is a plurality, if not a majority, in favor of restricted abortion rights. While almost all Americans back abortion in the case of rape, incest or threat to a mother's life, 81 percent in the *Los Angeles Times* survey want parental consent before minors can have abortions. As other surveys have shown, a majority also opposes public funding of abortions.

These figures suggest that voters' attitudes toward abortion depend greatly upon how politicians and partisans frame the issue. If voters feel the issue is whether to ban all abortions, then they are likely to line up with pro-choice politicians; if they feel that the issue is whether to allow unrestricted abortions, then they are more likely to take the pro-life side.

But most important in judging the political effect of abortion is what opinion analysts call "salience"—the degree to which abortion is the determining factor in a voter's decision on a particular candidate.

Rich Republicans, poor Democrats: Since *Roe vs. Wade*, abortion opponents have been much more likely to evaluate candidates on the basis of their abortion votes. In the pre-*Webster* *Los Angeles Times* survey, 47 percent of those who opposed *Roe vs. Wade* said they would switch their vote on the basis of a politician's stand on abortion, while only 25 percent who supported *Roe vs. Wade* said they would. But with the new Supreme Court decision, a higher percentage of pro-choice voters are expected to base their votes on a given politician's abortion stand.

Whether this matters, however, depends



Pro-choice marchers in New York City: are they setting the political agenda of the '90s?

The abortion battle and political choices

on what parties and candidates abortion partisans would otherwise vote for. Two constituencies that have traditionally voted Democratic—white Southern Protestants and urban Catholics—have both abandoned Democratic candidates who favor abortion

DEMOGRAPHICS

rights. In Iowa's 1978 U.S. Senate contest, for instance, Dubuque's anti-abortion Catholics provided the margin of victory for Republican Roger Jepsen's defeat of incumbent Democrat Dick Clark.

The threat of Democratic defections is borne out by findings that the less education and income a voter has, the more likely he or she is to oppose abortion. These lower-income, less-educated voters have also been more likely to vote Democratic. Lower- and middle-income blacks tend to be anti-abortion but don't base their party allegiance on this issue. Lower- and middle-income whites are far more likely to jump to the GOP because of the issue.

But, of course, the issue cuts both ways. If pro-choice voters began basing their votes on abortion alone, then large numbers of middle- and upper-income Republicans and independents would cross over to pro-choice Democratic candidates. This might also prove true for a large group of younger voters, who have tended to identify with Republicans but who favor abortion rights. The Republicans could lose as many voters as they have previously gained.

Democrats would, however, pay a certain price for this exchange. Republicans have prospered as a party of wealthy suburbanites and disenchanted blue-collar Democrats.

The infusion of Democrats has allowed country club Republicans to don the mantle of populism and deprive the Democrats of their tag as the party of the people. A Democratic Party that was comprised of minorities and upper-middle-class Republican émigrés disenchanted with the GOP's abortion stand could win some elections. But it would also forfeit its identification with the middle class—an identification upon which any long-term revival of the party must be based.

Pro-choice backlash: The perils of abortion politics become even more apparent when one looks at individual states. Some of the states that appear solidly anti-abortion like Utah, Nebraska and Oklahoma are likely to elect Republicans anyway, while some pro-choice states like Massachusetts, New

With pro-choice forces joining the single-issue game, party alignments may undergo significant changes in the years to come.

York and the District of Columbia are likely to remain in the Democratic column regardless. But in several key states, abortion may decide elections.

There is a dramatic difference between those states that could respond to a Democratic economic appeal and those states that might respond to a pro-choice platform. For instance, Alabama, South Carolina, Louisiana, Missouri and Pennsylvania are

fertile ground for an economic nationalist politics (see *In These Times*, July 5), but they are also the states where opposition to abortion has the strongest appeal. This means that if abortion becomes the dominant issue in 1990 and 1992, it could short-circuit a Democratic realignment along economic lines.

Republicans face, however, a similar dilemma. Republican opposition to abortion could cost the party votes in solidly pro-choice Colorado, California, Oregon and Washington and could destroy the party in the Northeast, where many of the Republican leaders are pro-choice moderates. The question in these states is whether the Republican Party's anti-abortion platform will dampen the GOP's natural appeal to well-to-do voters.

The first test of abortion politics will be the gubernatorial elections scheduled this November. In New Jersey, there are already clear signs that the court's decision in *Webster* has produced a pro-choice backlash. The Republican candidate, Rep. Jim Courter, had consistently voted against abortion in the House and won the endorsement of New Jersey Right to Life, but in the wake of the court decision, Courter toned down his right-to-life rhetoric. "My thinking is there's not the consensus here to modify the laws we now have in order to restrict abortions," Courter told the *Bergen Record*.

Courter may have been responding to the National Abortion Rights Action League's announcement that it would be spending \$1 million in New Jersey to defeat him, but he was probably also worried about New Jersey polls that show 57 percent of voters favoring unrestricted abortion rights.

In Virginia's gubernatorial race, Republican candidate Marshall Coleman cheered the court's decision and promised to restore the "inalienable rights" of Virginia's "preborn children," while his Democratic opponent, Lt. Gov. Doug Wilder, took a more equivocal position, supporting women's right to abortions while opposing public funding and supporting mandatory parental consent for minors. The black Democrat's stance could prove a boon to his candidacy among the white, middle-class suburbanites who live in the corridor stretching from Washington, D.C., to Norfolk. In the '80s, this group has decided Virginia's elections.

The court's ruling is also casting a shadow over 1990 governor's races. Illinois Attorney General Neil Hartigan, who is expected to seek the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, is backing away from a strong anti-abortion stand. In Massachusetts, Boston's populist Mayor Raymond Flynn must consider whether his opposition to abortion will prevent his winning the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. The president of Boston's chapter of the National Organization for Women has already threatened to make abortion a "litmus test issue" in the Democratic primary.

The cases of Courter and Flynn bear out the two sides of the Democratic abortion dilemma. Courter's sudden waffling on the issue shows the extent to which the court's ruling threatens Republicans in states like New Jersey. But the difficulties faced by Flynn, a promising politician with appeal to both urban ethnics and blacks, show how making abortion the determining issue for voters can undermine the Democrats' attempt to recast themselves as the party of the working and middle classes. The Democrats have something to gain from the new abortion politics, but also much to lose. □

IN THESE TIMES JULY 19-AUGUST 1, 1989 7

By Diana Johnstone

PARIS

ALTHOUGH ALARMED BY THE EPIDEMIC OF Gorbymania in West Germany occasioned by the Soviet leader's infectious visit to Bonn, France daringly let Mikhail Gorbachov into the country on an official trip in early July.

However, every precaution was taken to protect the French population from contagion. Editorials hammered away at the ravages of Gorbymania in the Federal Republic of Germany, Sovietologues argued over whether Gorbachov was a fake or a failure, and TV came up with ancient Cold War spy movies to set the mood. Public opinion survey questions were skillfully worded to produce expressions of "skepticism" ("Is Gorbachov a prisoner of the Communist system?"). On the eve of the visit, specialists announced proudly that the French seemed largely immune to Gorbymania, perhaps because their unique Gallic rational faculties reject "new thinking."

Draconian measures were taken to prevent handshaking, believed to be a method of transmission. Mikhail Gorbachov and his wife Raisa insisted on going to the Place de la Bastille in hopes of meeting Parisians. Although the media had carefully avoided publicizing the foray, a friendly crowd had gathered. Iron barriers held them back on the sidewalks, but this was not enough to stop the spunky Russian from dashing over to shake their hands. That job was accomplished by a loose pack of savage news photographers who cornered the Gorbachov couple, preventing the flesh-pressing and destroying their own photo opportunity. Free Western competition saved France from embarrassing images of Gorbymania.

On the official level, Gorbachov's visit to France went smoothly enough. In a rare gesture of openness, President François Mitterrand invited the Gorbachov couple to dinner in his own cozy private home in the Rue de Bièvre in the Paris Latin Quarter, rather than the Elysée Palace. Gorbyphilia filtered from the top was acceptable for France, *Le Monde* decreed, in contrast to mass Gorbymania in Germany.

Obsessed with "anchoring Germany to the West" and reassuring the Reagan administration as to the political insignificance of Communists in the French government, the first Mitterrand presidency brought French presence in Eastern Europe to a new low. In his second term, Mitterrand aspires to win back lost ground and not leave the field to the West Germans.

"We understand," Gorbachov told the French, "that in many fields we have fallen behind the ideas of our own socialist revolution, and the ideas of liberty, equality and justice that constitute the humanist source of social revolution have been distorted."

The French greet Gorbachov with a frappe on the back

In raising an artificial fuss about Gorbymania, the media set up their own barriers between the man in the street and the Soviet leader, as well as between the French and their German neighbors. The term both exaggerates and trivializes the German response to Gorbachov, which reflects relief at the end of a long period marked by the German invasion of the Soviet Union that left both countries in ruins. The strain of self-criticism in Gorbachov's *glasnost* strikes a particularly responsive chord with Germans who have had to look self-critically at their own past.

Sorbonne of contention: French public discourse, in contrast, tends toward self-congratulation. The bicentennial of the Revolution is marked by constant French crowing at having invented "human rights." Nevertheless, Gorbachov dared invite French opinionmakers to undertake some self-critical reflection about the West's anti-communism.

The Soviet president had asked for a meeting with Paris university students at the Sorbonne. But once again he was kept at a distance from the common people. The guest list for the Sorbonne talk included film stars and successful writers, among the world's best-dressed intellectuals. New philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy and *Libération* editor in chief Serge July were there to complain afterwards of being bored.

Mikhail in the lionizing den gave a speech that was clear and sober, qualities not exactly fashionable in the Parisian word factories. Some in the glittering audience, notably Régis Debray and Claude Lanzmann (author of the documentary film "Shoah") admitted to being impressed. Others complained that Gorbachov had given a speech instead of listening to questions, or voiced disappointment that he had failed to come up with some sensational announcement, such as welcoming Alexander Solzhenitsyn back to Russia.

Since revolution is a favorite theme of French intellectuals, and since France is in the midst of a lavish bicentennial celebration of its 1789 Revolution, it was a natural subject for Gorbachov at the Sorbonne. "Great social and political changes are always preceded by philosophical revolutions," he observed. This was true of the French Revolution, whose "intellectual and political heritage" in turn influenced the philosophers of the workers movement who inspired the Russian Revolution.

Gorbachov drew a comparison between the two. The first, or bourgeois revolution, he said, gave a powerful impulse to "a social system which made civilization and progress advance by giant steps through crises, pitiless competition, exploitation and expansion, through unrestrained development of productive forces stopping at nothing, through national and colonial wars and the subjugation of entire peoples." But this same system also "created new intellectual and scientific values elaborating in the course of class struggle universal democratic values."

The second, or socialist revolution was in part "a protest, a response to the contradictions and faults which appeared in the course of the development of the first." It also ran up against "violent resistance, just like the first at its birth."

But afterwards, "the natural development

of the new system of socialism turned out to be much more difficult. And not only for subjective reasons, following crude mistakes and violations of its own principles. The world relationship of forces was much less favorable for the socialist revolution over a century earlier, Gorbachov said. "It ran up against a system much more powerful, and that proved not at all to have exhausted its historic capacities."

Gorbachov added that "the desire to destroy the new system was one of the causes of fascism and the war it set off. It is also at the base of the Cold War that has risked pushing the whole world toward...a universal catastrophe." "We understand," the Soviet president said, "that in many fields we have, so to speak, fallen behind the ideas of our own socialist revolution," and that "the ideas of liberty, equality and justice that constitute the humanist source of social revolution have been distorted." *Perestroika* aims at achieving the "organic combination of socialism and democracy," a task proving "more difficult and contradictory" than expected. After acknowledging the shortcomings of his own system, Gorbachov tactfully suggested some parallel reflection in the other system.

Has the West, he asked, "ever actually realized where its fierce opposition to socialism has finally led the world? Does its policy in this matter correspond to the ideals of the French revolution? Isn't that an excellent subject of reflection for intellectuals on every continent?"

Redefining progress: In what was generally interpreted as a veiled reference to the Bush administration, Gorbachov complained of Western political leaders who see European unity only in terms of getting rid of socialism. This is just what has already led to wars, he recalled. "How many illusions still exist that only bourgeois society represents the absolute and eternal truth?" he asked.

Although class struggle still exists, the Soviet leader said priority must go to the general interests of humanity. "The development of material production cannot go on in its old forms with the same burden on the environment." He offered five suggestions toward a new concept of progress.

- Humanity cannot count on spontaneous development. "If we want to survive," the process must be jointly controlled.

- The 21st century needs a new notion of progress, taking into account "reasonable needs" of humanity, resources, ecology and demography, and the need to reduce the gap between the little group of rich industrialized countries and all the others, especially in the Third World.

- The new civilization "will not be a uniform monolith. On the contrary, its viability lies in its diversity and its intellectual, national, social, political and cultural plurality." This being the case, "tolerance toward another way of thinking and another way of life will be among the most important conditions of progress."

- Different systems must cooperate. "Not one of them can claim to bury the others if it doesn't want to commit suicide and bury all of humanity at the same time. This is the idea I would like to stress."

- Struggles for independence and social and political rights must not "overlook the hard realities of the nuclear century" or renounce in advance "the search for peaceful, political means to suppress contradictions and settle eventual conflicts."

The next day, a bunch of French intellectuals on a Paris-Moscow TV hookup set themselves up as judges of truth and human rights in the USSR. A Russian question as to their feeling of "responsibility for French influence" on developments in the Soviet Union was ignored. Asked about Gorbachov's impact, a French thinker said the main result was "a huge traffic jam in Paris." A Soviet participant, Alexander Tsipko, let some disappointment show with his remark that "only the Germans, after undergoing defeat, have allowed themselves the luxury of analyzing what is wrong."



Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov

The French don't need to demand the truth from us. We've come a long way." His only answer from the French intelligentsia was to be told pompously that "the truth will make you free."

The day of Gorbachov's arrival, media attention focused on a demonstration at the Paris stock exchange by holders of prerevolutionary Tsarist bonds demanding their—or their grandparents'—money back from Moscow. They were filled with the self-righteousness of a just cause. Nobody pointed out that the bonds were a result of French pressure to keep Russia in a war that caused its collapse and ensuing revolution, in order to help France win back Alsace-Lorraine from Germany in World War I.

The selective truth of the French media serves to justify the policy choices of the political class, notably support for France's nuclear *force de frappe*. Gorbymania is a direct threat to the French nuclear arsenal. The media may have hidden public opinion more effectively than they formed it. In one of the polls taken before the Gorbachov visit, "disarmament of all nuclear forces" was chosen by the French as top international priority. This taboo notion came in ahead of the European Single Market, which the media has been stressing almost daily for years. The French people are apparently learning their lesson, no matter how haltingly and slowly. □