

ISA Compromises Important

Students Learn Political Arts

By ROGER EBERT

After the dust of debate has settled and the delegates have returned to their campuses, the annual effort to interpret action of the National Student Congress gets under way.

Whether the interpretation is along liberal-conservative lines or from the viewpoint of an adminis-

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tration trying to see what the students are up to, it usually misses the mark for a basic reason:

Until you've attended the annual Congress and seen 1,500 delegates in action on dozens of levels, you can't really have much insight into what goes on there.

The Congress and its parent National Student Association are the sum of efforts by thousands of students who usually work without direct communication or even agreement.

They come from Utah and metropolitan New York, from the Ivy League and great state universities, and when they meet for 10 days to present the opinion of American students they often find compromise more practical than a long intellectual confrontation of ideas.

For this reason the resolutions which are hammered out in committees and finally brought to the floor often seem tentative and not entirely thought out.

In the full Congress plenary session where all 1,500 delegates participate in action on the most important resolutions, a process that would challenge the most expert parliamentarian take place.

Delegates usually propose from one to a dozen amendments to a bill, and sometimes even present complete substitute bills from the floor. Some amendments are basically stylistic, but others represent skilled attempts to alter the intent of a bill.

The bill ultimately passed is the product of compromise both in floor debate and informal floor caucuses. And while it is rarely altogether satisfying to both Congress liberals and conservatives, it usually will show which group spent the most time trying to influence it.

For this reason a post-Congress study of legislation by an outside observer might indicate that the Congress is a strangely contradictory body without an over-all philosophy.

This is partially true, although national and regional officers do exert substantial influence on the body and a series of liberal and conservative study groups attempt to present unified philosophies.

There is, however, a basic difference between the compromises of a National Student Congress and the compromises of mainstream American politics.

A U.S. Senate compromise, for example, often is simply the drifting of a measure from the more extreme edge of a party into the center of the political spectrum, through give-and-take.

But at the Congress both liberals and conservatives have to deal with sharply defined subgroups within their ranks.

The conservatives, for example, were represented by Young Republicans in the Eisenhower tradition and also by members of Young



VOTING AT CONGRESS. Three University delegates to the 15th National Student Congress held at Columbus this summer are shown voting during an all-night plenary session. Left to right are Ellen Filurin, senior in journalism; Cliff Steward, junior in commerce; and Phil Martin, senior in IAS and leader of the Illinois delegation. (Staff Photo by Ken Viste)

Americans for Freedom (YAF) and other militantly right-wing student groups. In addition, there was a certain amount of southern-northern friction.

Liberals went left from the Young Democrats to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and the campus division of Americans for Democratic Action (CADA). In addition, socialist student groups including the Young People's Socialist League were represented.

Three subgroups called for compromise within the broad political "wings" at the Congress, and often this occurred at the caucuses held by both liberals and conservatives.

After the caucuses had roughly defined their respective positions on bills in question, the problem of communication among the 1,500 delegates presented itself.

As a partial answer, two mimeographed newspapers supplied Congress news. They were the Liberal Bulletin, published by CADA, and the Conservative Enquirer, sponsored by the Conservative Study Group.

Word of mouth and floor debate also made positions on the bills clear, of course.

This complex and fascinating procedure for guiding an idea from the bull session to the plenary session was one of the most valuable experiences for delegates.

And, once again in 1962, it provided a sometimes confusing but consistently workable system for reflecting student opinion.

(Future articles will deal with important Congress legislation and the role played by Illini at the Congress.)