

## **Stevenson faced anti-U.N. mob in 1963**

On United Nations Day 1963, U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Adlai E. Stevenson II didn't come back to his hometown of Bloomington. Even so, he recorded a special message that was played at a city hall U.N. Day ceremony, and he authored an exclusive Pantagraph column on the challenges facing the international organization.

Instead of spending a peaceful Oct. 24 in Bloomington, Stevenson faced an ugly anti-U.N. crowd that night in Dallas, Tex., which was well on its way to becoming known as the "City of Hate."

Stevenson, born in 1900 into McLean County's most prominent Democratic family, spent his boyhood years in Bloomington. His grandfather, also named Adlai, served as vice president during Grover Cleveland's second term in the White House.

The younger Adlai worked in the Roosevelt administration during the Great Depression and World War II. In 1945, he was part of the U.S. delegation to a U.N. organizing conference in San Francisco. He would later say that he was "one of the jubilant midwives of the United Nations' birth and one of its anxious nurses during infancy."

Stevenson would then earn a national reputation as an eloquent liberal reformer and internationalist, first as Illinois governor (1949-1953) and then twice-nominated Democratic Party standard bearer (1952 and 1956), losing both times to Dwight D. Eisenhower. From 1961 until his death in 1965, Stevenson was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, serving under John F. Kennedy and then Lyndon B. Johnson.

Although his diplomatic life took him from the Manhattan cocktail circuit to the capitals of Europe and elsewhere, Stevenson maintained ties to his boyhood home. His only sibling, Elizabeth "Buffie" Ives, lived in the old family home on East Washington Street. Adlai and Elizabeth were also major shareholders in The Pantagraph, and that arrangement provided the main source of income for most of Adlai's adult years.

He also worked for this newspaper as a reporter and editor in his twenties before heading to Evanston and law school at Northwestern University. Perhaps it was for these reasons that he prepared his special statement to The Pantagraph for U.N. Day, Oct. 24, 1963. In it, he noted the rapid increase in the number of member countries due to the collapse of colonial empires controlling much of Africa and Asia (membership in the 18-year-old world body had increased from 51 nations in 1945 to 111 in 1963, with the number from Africa alone swelling from 4 to 33.)

Stevenson did not shy away from acknowledging the many deficiencies and disappointments of the U.N. Yet he always returned to its accomplishments and, most importantly, its promise. "Peoples long divided by race and by political subjugation, with all the lingering resentments that flow from that relationship, now meet in a community of equals at the United Nations," he wrote. "And that sense of community, tenuous though it may be, is no small element in the peace of this dangerous world."

Little did Pantagraph readers know at the time, but Bloomington's favorite son was receiving less-than-favorable treatment in the Lone Star State.

On Oct. 23, the day before Stevenson's visit to Dallas to celebrate U.N. Day, right-wing activists gathered under the banner of the National Indignation Convention to hold a counter-protest "United States Day." The featured speaker was disgraced former Maj. Gen. Edwin A. Walker, one of the leading far-right conspiracy mongers of the Cold War era.

Walker believed Eisenhower and Kennedy were dupes for the communists; the Civil Rights Movement and racial integration a communist plot; and Stevenson and the U.N. symbols of a global communist conspiracy. The day after the anti-U.N. event, handbills appeared in Dallas featuring President Kennedy's photograph, front and profile, with the words, "Wanted for Treason."

Stevenson ended a busy Oct. 24 in Dallas with a public speech on the U.N. before a large and generally supportive audience, though the applause greeting him included an ominous undercurrent of hissing and catcalls.

As he began his talk he was interrupted by Frank McGehee, the founder of the National Indignation Convention. He refused to sit down and allow Stevenson to continue. As police moved toward McGehee he scuffled with a schoolteacher sitting nearby. "Surely my dear friend," Stevenson said, "I don't have to come here from Illinois to teach Texas manners, do I?" As McGehee was escorted out of the hall Stevenson took one last jab at his tormenter. "For my part," he added, "I believe in the forgiveness of sin and the redemption of ignorance."

In an attempt to rattle Stevenson, some in the audience employed noisemakers, or began coughing or laughing in unison. "Kennedy will get his reward in hell," chanted one man who stood up. "Stevenson is going to die. His heart will stop, stop stop. And he will burn, burn burn."

Stevenson forged ahead with his remarks while, unbeknownst to him, some protesters made their way behind stage. Once there they pulled a rope which flipped over a "Welcome Adlai" sign to reveal one hidden behind it. The new sign read "U.N. Red Front."

As scuffles broke out in the crowd Stevenson refused to exit the stage. "I understand that some of these fearful groups are trying to establish a United States Day in competition with United Nations Day," he told the crowd. "This is the first time I have heard that the United States and the United Nations are rivals."

Stevenson finished his speech to a three-minute ovation, evidence that the protesters were in a minority, albeit a loud and disruptive one. Stevenson then learned some 100 picketers were outside the auditorium and circling his limousine, singing "Dixie" and "Onward, Christian Soldiers."

As he made his way to the limousine there was much shoving and shouting. At one point a placard came down squarely on Stevenson's head. He reeled back, startled but unhurt. Several protesters also spat on his face. He was asked if some picketers should be arrested. "I don't want to send them to jail," he replied. "I want to send them to school."

President Kennedy read about the confrontation the next day and asked White House aide Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. to let Stevenson know "we thought he was great." At first Stevenson joked about the incident before turning serious. "But, you know, there was something ugly and frightening about the atmosphere," he told Schlesinger. "Later I talked with some of the leading people there. They wondered whether the president should go to Dallas, and so do I."

On Nov. 22, 1963, four weeks after his visit to Dallas, Stevenson was lunching at the U.N. with a Chilean delegation when he got word Kennedy had been shot.