

Will Dukakis get the Eagleton treatment?

by Kathleen Klenetsky

Two weeks after Michael Dukakis's coronation in Atlanta, the Democratic Party's presidential candidate's campaign has taken a nosedive from which it may never recover. The state of Dukakis's mental health has now become the top issue of the U.S. presidential campaign. The media, both in the United States and around the globe, have been dominated by the question. Headlines like *La Stampa's* "Duke: I Am Not Mentally Ill" and the London *Guardian's* "Rumors Depress Dukakis," accompanied by stories and commentaries questioning whether he has ever had psychiatric treatment and why he won't release his medical records, and debating his emotional fitness for the presidency, have sent the Dukakis camp reeling.

Reports are circulating that Democratic Party kingmakers are drawing up contingency plans should Dukakis be forced to drop out of the race, as Democratic vice presidential candidate Tom Eagleton was in 1972, after it came out that he had undergone electro-shock treatments for depression.

The issue of Dukakis's psychological stability originated with the National Democratic Policy Committee, the political action group of the Lyndon LaRouche wing of the Democratic Party. The NDPC—which had issued a pamphlet last January documenting how the Dukakis administration in the state of Massachusetts encouraged financial and real estate speculators to destroy Boston's economy and rip off state taxpayers—circulated a leaflet at the Democratic convention in Atlanta, raising questions about Dukakis's emotional suitability for high office.

Entitled "Is Dukakis the New Senator Eagleton?" the leaflet called on delegates to give serious attention to evidence in the public domain that Dukakis had a personal and familial history of mental problems, which could prevent him from fulfilling his responsibilities as President, especially in a time of crisis, before selecting him as the party's presidential nominee. The leaflet drew a correlation between Dukakis's psychological profile, his cold, ruthless, unemotional

makeup, and his policies of vicious austerity—a key point ignored by the subsequent deluge of media coverage.

EIR News Service was the first agency to report on the contents of the leaflet. But other media outlets soon followed, after a *Boston Herald* reporter who had received a copy of the NDPC leaflet, asked Dukakis at a July 29 press conference to comment on reports that he had received psychiatric treatment twice: after his brother Stelian was killed in 1973, and in the wake of his resounding reelection defeat in 1978. Dukakis reportedly shrugged his shoulders, and walked away, but later, campaign spokesman Dayton Duncan put out a statement categorically denying the charges.

As rumors continued to circulate, fueled, in part, by Dukakis's refusal to answer a *Detroit News* questionnaire to the presidential candidates, asking whether they had ever had psychiatric treatment, the Dukakis camp began to panic. It placed a series of unsolicited phone calls to the media, denying that Dukakis had been treated for depression. That resulted in a front-page *Washington Times* article Aug. 2, headlined "Dukakis Psychiatric Rumor Denied," which reported that the Dukakis campaign had been calling the media in an attempt to squash the story, but noted that the candidate was still refusing to release his medical records. The article also cited a *Boston Globe* report of July 30, which traced the story to the NDPC leaflet.

The story reached a new plateau later that day, when *EIR* Washington correspondent Nicholas F. Benton asked White House press secretary Marlin Fitzwater, whether he thought presidential candidates should be expected to release their medical records as a matter of course. "No comment," Fitzwater replied.

Dukakis the 'invalid'

But the floodgates really opened when Benton asked the same question of President Reagan at the White House the next day. "Look," replied the smiling President, "I don't

want to pick on an invalid.”

Although the President claimed he was just joking, his remark made the issue of Dukakis's mental health into the lead item of the international media. As one British newspaper observed, in the wake of Reagan's comments, "The question of Mr. Dukakis's mental stability" had become "a blazing issue in the presidential race."

That evening, Dukakis was forced to call a press conference, to deny that he had ever sought help to combat depression or other mental illness. His personal physician, Gerald R. Plotkin, told reporters that, Dukakis "has never appeared depressed to me" and has "never demonstrated any symptoms or signs" suggesting mental depression or other forms of mental instability. He said he was not aware of any occasion on which Dukakis might have sought help for emotional problems.

If Dukakis thought this would get him off the hook, he was wrong. Although some of the leading establishment media, such as the *New York Times* and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, are mightily trying to give the impression that Dukakis has laid the issue to rest, there is a strong element of wishful thinking at work. For one thing, as numerous commentators less favorably disposed toward Dukakis have pointed out, the candidate is still refusing to release his medical records. The only document he has produced so far, is a three-page summary, authored by Plotkin. Furthermore, since Plotkin is an internist and not a psychiatrist, he is not necessarily qualified to make a judgment on Dukakis's emotional condition. Third, even if Dukakis were to release his records, questions would surely be raised as to whether they had been doctored. Even the *Washington Post*, a stalwart fan of "the Duke," admitted in its coverage of the candidate's press conference, that his continued refusal to make his records public "has helped keep alive the swirling but unproven rumors that he may have undergone professional treatment for depression."

Dukakis's press conference did nothing to stem the flow of stories. The day after, the *Daily Express* of London commented, "At one stage, [Dukakis] is believed to have received electro-shock therapy." The *Washington Times* ran a lead item reporting on an interview it had conducted with Dukakis's sister-in-law, Jane Peters, who admitted that "it is possible" that Dukakis had consulted "on a friendly basis" with his close friend, psychiatrist Donald Lipsitt, following his 1978 electoral defeat. Dukakis spokesman Mark Gearan responded, "Governor Dukakis has never sought or received professional treatment from a psychiatrist, a fact unrelated to whether or not he has psychiatrists as colleagues or friends." The carefully crafted remark is open to the interpretation that Dukakis has consulted with his psychiatrist friends on an informal basis.

Lipsitt is just one of several psychiatrists whom Dukakis numbers among his closest friends. Another, Dr. Gary Jacobson, is being pursued by investigators determined to dis-

cover whether rumors that he counseled Dukakis are true. Jacobson, involved in another scandal concerning Dukakis, this one centered on the state's selection of property he owned in New Braintree, Massachusetts for a prison site, reportedly told one journalist that he couldn't comment on reports that he treated Dukakis, because that would violate doctor-patient confidentiality.

Some of Dukakis's media backers have now tried a new tack—defending the right of the psychologically unstable to become President! Both the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the *New York Times* printed editorials Aug. 5 contending that seeking psychiatric help should be considered a sign of strength—but refusing to deal with the issue of whether someone with a history of emotional problems should become President.

Even if Dukakis manages to survive the furor over his emotional state, there are more time bombs in the way of his march to the White House. Perhaps the most imminent is the Massachusetts budget fiasco, which has become particularly embarrassing given Dukakis's claims to "managerial competence." Massachusetts Rep. John Flood (D-Canton), in an Aug. 4 interview with *EIR*, said that he has gathered 58 of the 64 signatures necessary to convene a special session calling into question Dukakis's methods of "balancing the budget," but that Dukakis was "personally calling legislators to convince them not to sign."

The LaRouche factor

What has caused the most weeping and gnashing of teeth in Establishment circles is not so much that Dukakis may be destroyed, but the preeminent part which associates of Lyndon H. LaRouche have played in forcing the issue of Dukakis's mental stability onto center stage.

The media has been chock full of stories—ranging in tone from the amazed to the totally outraged—analyzing LaRouche associates' role in "Dukakisgate." A silly debate is raging over whether the Republicans are using LaRouche to get Dukakis, or vice versa. Dukakis circles claim the former: New York Gov. Mario Cuomo, for instance, went on national television Aug. 4 to assert that "there's something significant about what the Republicans have done here, the fact that they would use Lyndon LaRouche to get this thing started." Some Republican-oriented media, on the other hand, claim that rumors about Dukakis's emotional health were circulating long before the NDPC's "Eagleton" leaflet hit the streets.

Behind all this silliness lies the real fear: that, should Dukakis be forced out or weakened sufficiently, LaRouche's credibility and political standing will skyrocket. LaRouche ran for the Democratic presidential nomination, and is now being urged to mount an independent presidential campaign this fall. Bemoaning the implications of this, the *Boston Globe* commented Aug. 5 that LaRouche will emerge as the big "winner" of the uproar over the Duke.