

FAMILY PARTY AT THE COW PALACE

THE result of the Republican Convention at San Francisco was a foregone conclusion, but for a New Zealander unaccustomed to the excitement of American politics, says BEATRICE ASHTON, it was a drama without parallel.

SAN FRANCISCO, August 23

FOR four days I have been sitting in the vast oval of concrete and steel now known to the world as the Cow Palace, watching the Republican Party press on through the machinery of a streamlined agenda to wind up in a frenzy of enthusiasm for its November standard bearers. There were no hitches, no surprises, and in contrast to the Democratic convention the week before, no disagreements on camera.

After the high drama in Chicago, where Adlai Stevenson emerged as the undisputed leader of his party, after the neck-and-neck race between Kennedy and Kefauver for the Vice-Presidential nomination, this confident unanimity in San Francisco frustrated the army of reporters present and undoubtedly bored the television audience. Not until the end of the second day, when the President set up his temporary White House in the St. Francis Hotel, did the convention come to life. But for a New Zealander set down in its midst there was no frustration, no boredom—this was a shindig without parallel.

If the Democratic Convention had been exciting enough to persuade me to spend my lunch hours in the nearest bar, peering at a shimmering screen in the half daylight, this performance at the Cow Palace was the real thing, made up of flesh and blood, master-minded in the manner of a Cecil B. de Mille, and with a cast of thousands. Yet even here, television dominated the scene, and the three-hour time-lag between San Francisco and the great centres of population in the East forced the convention sessions to run from mid-afternoon through the dinner hour.

The monstrous power of a medium that relentlessly exposes the slightest human error was apparent in the nervous gavel of the chairman and the clockwork precision of the programme. The eye of the camera could never be ignored for a moment, and each party has sat in caucus before a possible audience of 168 million people.

The Republican Convention opened so hard on the heels of its long-winded rival that there was an air of unreality about the weekend between. To reassure ourselves that the fresh outburst of news and excitement was actually happening here, rather than on our television set, we tossed the camera-eye view and the pundits' prophecies aside and set out to see for ourselves.

"Go straight ahead for the Cow Palace." Thus a nuggety newsboy, doing his bit for a visitor. There it sat, the building with the ridiculous name, squat and solid behind a shining sea of cars. Built during the depression it was immediately the subject of hot controversy. "Building a palace for cows while people are starving," sneered a letter to the paper, and thus as first derisively and then affectionately, it came to be called the Cow Palace. Not every city can play host to a convention and it was the size of



PRESIDENT EISENHOWER AT SAN FRANCISCO AIRPORT

"The organised clamour was drowned in the open-throated delight of the crowd"

the building, its seating capacity of 15,000, and its open floor space intended for cattle shows and rodeos that finally persuaded the Republicans to convene here.

San Franciscans never doubted that the star of the convention would be San Francisco. "It has taken a year to plan, and cost the city a quarter of a million dollars," said the Mayor in a television interview, "but we think it's worth it to know that the dateline round the world this week will be San Francisco." He might have added that an estimated 40,000 visitors would be good for business. Week after week while convention fever mounted, San Francisco was spread out in full colour in half a dozen national magazines, its photogenic qualities caught in a hundred different poses. But none of these charms, the slender bridge across the Golden Gate, the elegant shops, the sophisticated eating houses, not even the idea that this is a city for fun and frolic, was as enticing to the delegates as the promise of cool weather.

"What did you talk about with the President?" newsmen asked former President Hoover after his social call at the San Francisco White House. "We agreed that it was a pleasure to be in this air-conditioned city," said Mr. Hoover.

Forewarned against the chilling fog that drifts in off the Pacific through the Golden Gates, the delegates' wives lifted their mink stoles out of summer storage. And the night before the convention it was especially cold. Up on Nob Hill visitors shivered as they shuttled between the Mark Hopkins and Fairmont Hotels. This was the nerve centre of the convention, and here, had the Republicans been in a fighting mood, all backstage difficulties would have been settled. But they were not in a fighting mood. They closed their ranks against the brave efforts of Harold Stassen to stimulate a race for the Vice-Presidential nomination, they had come to agree, and to have a whale of a good time.

Never, even in fur-minded San Francisco, have I seen so much mink, so much high fashion, so much sleekness and confidence as in the foyer of the Mark Hopkins. Because it seemed the thing to do we slid up the nineteen-floor express elevator and followed the crowd to the top of the Mark. The much-praised, fabulous view, I have yet to see. Instead, we were swathed in a cocoon of fog, dazzled by the Hollywood décor and seated among people who were doing their blasé best to be unimpressed. Down below, somewhere in one of the 500 rooms taken over by the party (23 hotels were required in all) was the Vice-President. Not yet shaken by the



LEFT: "A man with the look of a winner"—Vice-President Nixon and his wife at The Mark Hopkins Hotel