

# Camel Bites Dachshund

by Gus Tyler and David Wells

On November 10, in broad daylight, the New York State Legislature, meeting in a special session called by Governor Nelson Rockefeller, stole away enough Democratic Congressional districts to give the GOP an added margin of 10 to 12 seats from New York in the next Congress. In the last election, New York State sent 22 Democrats and 21 Republicans to the House of Representatives. In the next election, given the identical voting pattern, 25 or 26 Republicans and 15 or 16 Democrats will be elected. A Democratic margin of one will be converted to a Republican margin of at least nine - not because of any switches on the part of the voters, but simply because of a shifting of Congressional district boundary lines!

Gerrymandering is not, of course, a peculiarly Republican practice. In California, where, a decade ago, the GOP drew the district lines to give themselves a marked advantage, the Democrats having captured control of the legislature, turned the tables this year. They created districts which range in population from 338,000 to 592,000; they drew lines designed to lump as many Republicans into as few districts as possible; they carved out one T-shaped district in Los Angeles County which dangles a long thin tail for many miles down the Pacific shoreline. Oddly enough, more than half the Republican members of the California assembly voted in favor of a Democratic redistricting bill - reportedly as a result of a deal which strengthened the seats of some Republicans at the expense of other Republicans.

But there are relatively few Democratic gerrymanders directed against Republicans for the simple reason that Democrats only rarely have the opportunity. In most of the two-party states of the Northeast, Midwest and West, Republicans with their voting strength centered in the overrepresented rural areas have maintained control of the state legislatures, and it is the legislatures which draw the district lines. Currently, for example, aside from the Southern and border states, Democrats control fewer than one-third of the legislatures. The only major states in this group are California and Massachusetts, and in the latter state the veto-power of a Republican Governor has created a stalemate over redistricting. In the South, most of the

gerrymandering is done by rural Democrats to urban Democrats.

In New York, the boundaries of the new districts were not revealed either to the public or the legislators until the day the bill was introduced. In response to demands for public hearings, State Senator McEwen, chairman of the committee which drew the new lines, stated that reapportionment was "strictly a technical subject" and that "no argument offered at a public hearing, no matter how emotional, political or impassioned it might be, can change a census statistic." After the outlines of the gerrymander were made public, it was easy to understand the Senator's reluctance to face a public hearing over the projected larceny.

The newly-drawn Congressional district boundary lines were engineered with a clear purpose in mind: to eliminate as many Democratic districts as possible, to create as many new GOP districts as possible, and to keep existing GOP districts as safely Republican as possible. The primary objective in Upstate New York was to reduce the number of Democratic representatives from three to two. It is within New York City, however, that the art of gerrymandering can be seen in its clearest form.

A brief glance at the shapes of some of the new districts is enough to make a drinker go on the wagon. The map on page 10 reveals a zoo-full of fantastically-shaped creatures slithering through the streets of New York City. Among the Brooklyn fauna are a camel biting the tail of a barking dachshund (the 14th CD), a mechanical dinosaur with key attached (the 15th CD) and a vulture (the 16th CD) - the vulture is flying towards its newly-laid egg: Staten Island. Also in Brooklyn one finds an X-ray of a badly-shattered elbow (the 10th CD), an accusing finger (the 12th CD) and a silhouette of General Washington in uniform (the 11th CD). Up in The Bronx, the Legislature has carved out a fiery dragon (the 24th CD) and a snake suffering from indigestion after having swallowed a giraffe (the 23rd CD). In the Queens cages are a chicken with its head being cut off (the 6th CD), a shimoo (the 7th CD) and an upside-down pregnant crocodile (the 8th CD). Upstate New York has been spared from the beasts, but the 35th CD is clearly a submarine extending from Schenectady to Rochester, with a periscope poked into Lake Ontario - apparently about to torpedo Toronto.

The contorted shape of the Brooklyn districts results from the effort of the Legislature to create at

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*The New York City Congressional Menagerie*

least two GOP seats in heavily-Democratic Brooklyn. This can only be done by stringing together many widely-separated pockets of Republican strength. The two districts thus drawn are the 15th and 16th. The 15th district connects normally-Republican Bay Ridge in the southwestern corner of the Borough with several Republican-leaning upper income blocks in Brooklyn Heights (in northwest Brooklyn) and in the Prospect Park area (in central Brooklyn). These neighborhoods are connected only by a large cemetery.

The 16th district includes Staten Island – which is to the west of Brooklyn – and a remote Republican pocket on the opposite (southeastern) side of Brooklyn. The two parts of the 16th CD are separated not only by the waters of the Narrows and the Atlantic Ocean, but by two other districts! Another Brooklyn monstrosity is the 14th district, which consists of a northern section (Greenpoint and Williamsburg) and a southern section (Red Hook and Erie Basin) connected by a sort of “Polish corridor” some nine blocks long and one block wide, running between an express highway and the East River. (Several wharves but no homes are located within the corridor.)

In The Bronx, the men charged with drawing up the new lines faced a problem: how to keep the district now represented by Congressman Paul Fino safely Republican. Since the last redistricting, a decade ago,

many parts of the district have had a heavy influx of Democrats. But the district-drawers got around the problem easily – if not neatly. They simply lopped increasingly-Democratic Riverdale out of the district, tacked it on to the neighboring, heavily Democratic 23rd district, and then drew a boundary between the 23rd and 24th districts which is so irregular as to defy description.

Queens County posed a relatively easy problem. Ten years ago, the districts were drawn so as to give both parties two Queens seats. In 1960, however, the Democrats violated the rules. They won a third seat, leaving the GOP with but one. However, with a little stretching here, some shortening there, and the creation of a few carefully-placed prongs, salients and indentations, the chances are good that the two-two split will be restored.

The shapes of the new districts do not tell the whole story. There are also wide disparities in district populations which range from a high of 460,000 to a low of 352,000. The average population of the five Brooklyn districts conceded to the Democrats is 444,000. The average for the two Republican districts is 351,000. The average population of the three Manhattan Democratic districts is 439,000. The one GOP district has a population of only 382,000. (In defending the redistricting, the Republicans pointed out that the average population of the New York City districts was about the same as the average population of those Upstate, but they failed to mention these great disparities in population between different districts in the City.)

The re-gerrymandering of New York State Congressional lines is an excellent example of the way inequality at the state level of government is transmitted to the federal level. Gross over-representation of the state's rural areas in the Legislature makes it virtually impossible for the Republicans to lose control of either house in Albany. The Legislature, in turn, carves out the Congressional district boundaries in a way that results in GOP over-representation in the state's Congressional delegation.

The election of 1958 provided a perfect illustration of the way in which the manipulation of district lines and the juggling of district populations can distort the complexion of both the state and federal law-making bodies. In that year, Democratic candidates for the New York State Senate received 50.3 percent of the state-wide vote, but Republicans won a 34-24 edge in State Senate seats. Democratic candidates for the State Assembly received 50.2 percent of the state-wide vote, but the GOP won a 92-58 edge in Assembly seats. Democratic Congressional candidates received 50.7 percent of the state-wide vote, but Republicans won 24 Congressional seats to the Democrats' 19! Thus were Democratic majorities in the polling booths converted into Republican majorities in the legislative chambers.