



1950

## Personalities and Issues of the Presidential Election of 1920

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PERSONALITIES AND ISSUES OF THE  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION  
OF 1920

by  
Jeanne Demling

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of Master  
of Arts in Loyola University

June  
1950

VITA

Jeanne Rita Demling was born in Chicago, Illinois, June 4, 1925.

She was graduated from the Academy of Our Lady, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1943.

The Bachelor of Arts degree, summa cum laude, with a major in History was conferred by Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana, June, 1947.

From 1947 to 1950 the writer has been engaged in teaching history and English at Loretto Academy, Hirsch High School and South Shore High School. During the past three years she has devoted time to graduate study in history at Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois.

VI. The Election as a "Solemn Referendum". . . . .  
The "earthquake" - 37 out of 48 - A triple precedent broken - Newspaper comments - Reasons why - Wilsonism and normalcy - Best man lost - Issues of the election - Were the Results a mandate against the League? - The President-elect - Conclusions.

240,468, Lowden - 120,391; next came Charles Evans Hughes, William Howard Taft, Calvin Coolidge, and Warren Gamaliel Harding, eighth on the list, with 36,795 straw votes.<sup>3</sup> Despite the large popular demand for Hoover, from a political standpoint it was not well-organized, since his managers were amateurs who did not know how to capitalize on his great popularity.<sup>4</sup>

Many wise forecasters did not hesitate to say that 1920 would be an auspicious year for "dark horse" candidates. Even a great war had failed to supply a popular hero and champion, and there was no sound of that spontaneous acclaim that has sometimes greeted those popularly chosen to lead. Leonard Wood, who as governor general of Cuba had supervised the purging of yellow fever, a chief of staff of the United States Army, was regarded as Theodore Roosevelt's heir. The popularity of his name bloomed early, but Wood's enthusiastic supporters would have been better pleased had it been delayed until the spring or early summer of the election year.<sup>5</sup> Wood's entrance into Ohio and Illinois had caused hard feelings among the favorite sons there and perhaps caused them to throw their votes at the Convention to a lesser

man.<sup>6</sup> A further handicap to Wood was the fact that he was a military man at a time when the United States was tired of all things military. Nevertheless, Leonard Wood's candidacy suffered its

<sup>3</sup> "The Nomination of Harding and Coolidge" in Current Opinion, July, 1920, 1  
<sup>4</sup> William Starr Myers, The Republican Party: A History, Century Company, New York, 1928, 442  
<sup>5</sup> "What Kind of a President Would Leonard Wood Make?" in Current Opinion, February, 1920, 175  
<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Page, "The Meaning of What Happened at Chicago," in World's Work, August, 1920, 365

greatest setback with the charges of exorbitant campaign expenditures, with the intention to "buy the presidency." Harry M. Daugherty, Harding's campaign manager, claimed credit for the Senate investigation of funds:

I got the right man to pour into Senator Borah's ear the truth about this vast expenditure of money in a primary election and suggested that the foundations of the Republic were being destroyed by this method of making a President. Borah made an eloquent speech and demanded an immediate investigation by a Senatorial Committee, and got it. I was summoned to appear and testify. I answered all questions with great caution and I made no bitter accusations against our opponents. In fact I refused to make any accusations whatever.<sup>7</sup>

A second, and more creditable, version of the Senate investigation was that the New York World, following a lead in a campaign speech by Senator Hiram Johnson which hit at the money gushing from the Wood headquarters, uncovered a list of Wood's contributors which the World promptly turned over to Johnson's ally in the Senate, Borah. The Senate, aroused by a blistering speech by Borah, appointed the Kenyon Committee to look into the matter.

The committee's report on the campaign funds was as follows:

Leonard Wood. . . . .	\$1,773,303
Frank O. Lowden. . . . .	414,000
Hiram W. Johnson. . . . .	194,000
Herbert Hoover. . . . .	173,000
Warren G. Harding. . . . .	113,000 <sup>9</sup>

Colonel William C. Proctor, manufacturer of Ivory Soap, had con-

<sup>7</sup> Harry M. Daugherty, The Inside Story of the Harding Tragedy, Churchill Company, New York, 1932, 30  
<sup>8</sup> Samuel H. Adams, The Incredible Era, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1939, 127  
<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 129

tributed \$710,000 to Wood's campaign chest; on the other hand, Lowden's fund came from his own personal fortune. Wood's huge campaign fund reflected no discredit on his honesty and was not an attempt to "buy the presidency." The defense of his large expenditures was based upon the legitimate expenses made necessary by the Presidential primary, which forced an advertising campaign on a gigantic scale in order to secure delegates.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless for the Wood forces the investigation was a catastrophe; since it is almost certain that, without the Kenyon Committee exposures, Wood's popularity and public record would have won the convention<sup>11</sup> and then the election.

Next to Wood, the principal candidate was Governor Frank O. Lowden of Illinois. He was a successful Chicago lawyer and had been a long-time member of the Republican National Committee. He had served five years in Congress and had made a striking record as Governor of Illinois. In both character and personality Lowden was an extremely able candidate. The Old Guard Senators looked with favor upon Lowden's candidacy after the poor showing of Senator Harding in the Ohio primary; but they swung back to Harding when Lowden too was involved in the misuse of campaign funds. Two delegates from Missouri, pledged to Lowden, had received \$2500 each to promote Lowden sentiment in their localities. They pocketed the cash, and as a result, the scrupulously honest Lowden was accused of buying delegates.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "The High Cost of Nominating a President," in Current Opinion, July, 1920, 12  
<sup>11</sup> Adams, 129  
<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 138

Thus the one real statesman among the Republicans became unavail-<sup>5</sup>  
13  
able.

Herbert Hoover's party affiliation was in doubt until the last day of March when he took his stand as a Republican, even though he had asked the people to return a Democratic Congress in the 1918 election.<sup>14</sup> It was said that he combined the best characteristics of both parties: the administrative efficiency of which the Republican party prides itself, and the jealousy of individual rights for which the Democratic party has stood. Hoover was popular with the people; but the party leaders hesitated to take the risk.

The candidacy of Hiram Johnson would never be popular with the regulars of the Republican party who could not forget that he had been Theodore Roosevelt's fellow candidate on the Bull Moose ticket in 1912, nor that he had failed to support Hughes against Wilson in 1916, instead swinging his state, California, and the election away from the Republican party. However, there were those who admired Johnson as the true standard-bearer of progressivism and isolationism. Having made a lively campaign, Johnson could not be overlooked, since out of twelve states on whose ballots his name appeared, he led in seven.

Another Republican possibility was Calvin Coolidge, Governor of Massachusetts, who had come before the public eye as a result of the Boston police strike. In his autobiography Coolidge declared:

13 William E. Dodd, Wilson and His Work, P. Smith, New York, 1932, 422

14 "The Meaning of Mr. Hoover's Candidacy," Current Opinion, March, 1920, 291



I did not wish to use the office of Governor in an attempt to prosecute a campaign for nomination for some other office. I therefore made a public statement announcing that I was unwilling to appear as a candidate and would not enter my name in any contest at the primary. 15

Coolidge also described a visit by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, requesting that he should present the Governor's name at the national convention, going as a delegate with that understanding.

Coolidge refused to become a candidate, but promised to arrange for Lodge to be a delegate at large for Massachusetts. He also sagely noted that some people from Massachusetts only pretended to support him as a candidate, as a ruse to be chosen as delegates to the convention.

16 Coolidge's strength would be negligible, except in the case of a deadlock. According to pre-convention newspaper odds, the chances against his being nominated for the Presidency were fifteen to one. 17

Before the convention opened there were eighteen candidates and it was still anybody's fight, even though Wood and Lowden were leading. Early in June, 1920, "like long lines of ants hastening to a giant anthill,"<sup>18</sup> the 984 delegates and many, many more observers and hangers-on converged on Chicago and took their seats in the Coliseum. William Allen White produced a classic description of a political convention, comparing

15 Calvin Coolidge, The Autobiography of Calvin Coolidge, Cosmopolitan Book Corporation, New York, 1929, 145

16 Ibid., 144

17 Claude M. Fuess, Calvin Coolidge, the Man from Vermont, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1940, 251

18 Thomas A. Bailey, Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal, Macmillan Company, New York, 1945, 299

it to an Indian pow-wow. When the Republican National Convention opened in 1920, the Republican party was composed of about six different factions. There was the senatorial cabal, greatly excited over the Treaty and the League of Nations; there was the Republican organization which controlled the southern delegates whose votes at the convention were just as important as the delegates from those states which would be in the Republican column in November; there was the remnant of the Progressive faction, which had mostly scattered after Roosevelt's refusal to run in 1916; there was the Wall Street crowd, the protective tariff contingent, and the powerful financial interests.<sup>20</sup> Of all the factions, it was the Senate Cabal, the Old Guard, which was in control of the convention. There was a reason for this domination. The one issue that menaced party unity was the League of Nations; and on this issue the Republican Senators had fought their way to a working agreement at Washington.<sup>21</sup> Only a bolt at the convention could lose the election for the party in November; therefore a bolt must be avoided at all costs. The New York Times characterized the convention as "government of the Senate, by the Senate and for the Senate"; and the Chicago Evening Post declared that into the unbosomed convention which the delegates had been promised, "steps the Republican Senate as the supreme boss."<sup>22</sup>

The center of the Old Guard cabal was Senator Henry Cabot Lodge  
 19 William Allen White, A Puritan in Babylon, Macmillan Company, New York, 1938, 189

20 White, Masks in a Pageant, 403

21 "The Nomination of Harding and Coolidge," Current Opinion, July, 1920, 3

22 Ibid.

of Massachusetts who delivered the keynote address and later steered the convention as temporary, and then permanent, chairman. Around Lodge gathered the others of the clique: Frank G. Brandegee of Connecticut, Reed Smoot of Utah, Watson and New of Indiana, Charles W. Curtis of Kansas, Governor William Sproul of Pennsylvania, who acted as the proxy of ailing Senator Penrose.

The keynote speech by Lodge was not regarded as a great success; rather it was the uninspiring utterance of a cynical politician. Prohibition and the resulting high price of hard liquor were blamed for the lack of response. <sup>23</sup> Only a few passages evoked applause, one of which was the following:

Mr. Wilson and his dynasty, his heirs and assigns, or anybody that is his, anybody who with bent knees has served his purpose, must be driven out from all control of the government and all influence in it. <sup>24</sup>

Commenting on the speech, the New York Times remarked that it must be kept in mind that Lodge was talking as a Republican, to Republicans, for Republicans; typically maintaining that all is good that originates with Republicans, all is bad that is of Democratic origin. <sup>25</sup>

The Los Angeles Daily Times stated: Perhaps some of his extreme criticisms of the President would have better been left unsaid. There are phrases that betray a personal animosity. One feels in reading them that Senator Lodge was not only castigating the Democratic administration, but flaying a personal enemy. That part of the address recalls the bitter fight between the President and the Senate and weakens what was otherwise a masterful effort. <sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Bailey, 300

<sup>24</sup> Adams, 145

<sup>25</sup> Editorial: "Mr. Lodge's Speech," New York Times, June 9, 1920

<sup>26</sup> Editorial: "Senator Lodge's Speech," Los Angeles Daily Times, June, 9, 1920

It was further pointed out that those who deliver the keynote speeches are not always regarded as the greatest orators<sup>27</sup> of their time.

After the platform, which will be discussed in a succeeding chapter, had been constructed and approved, the balloting for the Republican nomination began. Since the delegates numbered 984, 493 votes were necessary for the choice. 341 delegates were committed by pledge to one of the four leading contenders: General Wood had 124 pledges, Johnson 112, Lowden 66, and Harding 39. The other delegates were uninstructed beyond the obligation of casting a courtesy vote for the favorite son until released.<sup>28</sup>

The nominating speeches began on Friday, June 11, with a total of twenty-two candidates. Harry M. Daugherty, Harding's campaign manager, purposely held the speech nominating Harding back until toward the end, so that ex-Governor Frank B. Willis' sparkling, eight-minute oration would lift the tired spirits of the delegates.<sup>29</sup> Harding's nomination received the most spontaneous applause, although his three rivals had more protracted, albeit artificial, demonstrations. The people in the galleries gave a tremendous ovation to Herbert Hoover's nomination, but there was little enthusiasm among the delegates below.<sup>30</sup>

Warren Harding just missed being defeated in the state primary and came to the convention with a split delegation from Ohio. Before the convention opened, the choice men of his organ-

<sup>27</sup> Editorial: "The Keynote Speeches," Christian Science Monitor, June 8, 1920

<sup>28</sup> Adams, 145

<sup>29</sup> Daugherty, 41

<sup>30</sup> Adams, 146

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31  
ization were transferred to Chicago. Sixty rooms and an assembly  
room, which cost \$750 a day, were engaged at the Congress Hotel.  
Daugherty's plan of campaign was centered on second choice votes  
and he avoided making enemies of other candidates or the dele-  
gates.<sup>32</sup> Through his staff of 500 picked men, personal contact  
was made with three-fourths of the delegates, building up friend-  
liness for a candidate whom no one expected to win. The Columbus  
Glee Club of seventy-five voices was brought to the convention,  
not to shout Harding's name to the skies, but to visit the head-  
quarters of rival candidates and serenade them.<sup>33</sup> Daugherty's  
strategy from the start was to pass Wood with Lowden, and then  
to proceed to build up Harding's vote, from what had been loaned  
to Lowden.<sup>34</sup>

The convention experts were jolted by Wood's unex-  
pected strength on the first ballot - 287½ votes. Then in order  
came Lowden with 211½, Johnson with 133½, Sproul of Pennsylvania  
with 83½, Nicholas Murray Butler of Columbia University with 69,  
and Harding with 64½; the remaining votes were scattered among  
the favorite sons. Trading among delegates began. Daugherty  
promised a few Ohio votes to Lowden in order to check Wood. The  
New York contingent switched some votes to Lowden; but Mayor  
William Dale Thompson of Chicago was dealing to check his enemy,  
Lowden.<sup>35</sup> At the end of the fourth ballot, the final of the day,<sup>36</sup>

31 Daugherty, 34

32 Ibid.

33 Mark Sullivan, Our Times, Vol. VI, "The Twenties," Charles  
Scribner's Sons, New York, 1935, 51

34 Daugherty, 43

35 Adams, 147

36 Ibid.

Wood's count was  $314\frac{1}{2}$ , Lowden had 239, Johnson came next with  $140\frac{1}{2}$ , then Sproul with  $82\frac{1}{2}$ , and Harding was fifth with  $61\frac{1}{2}$ .

By then it was obvious that the leading contenders had neutralized one another, and that further balloting at the moment would not materially change this situation. What was needed was an opportunity to survey the field of dark horses and to select an agreeable compromise candidate. Furthermore, should the convention go into a night deadlock, Republican party harmony might suffer. <sup>37</sup> Senator Smoot of Utah conferred with Chairman Lodge and a motion to adjourn was offered. The scattered

"ayes" of the delegates were outnumbered by the "nos" of those who wanted to fight to the finish; Chairman Lodge, cool and unmoved, declared the convention adjourned until ten o'clock the following morning. <sup>38</sup>

Lodge had arbitrarily taken the authority which his position gave him morally, if not under parliamentary law, and sent the weary delegates home. <sup>39</sup>

The majority accepted the decision with the attitude of "father knows best," and the supporters of Wood and Lowden assumed their candidates would continue their race for the nomination the next day. <sup>40</sup>

From the adjournment on, the influence of the convention declined and it became merely a body which confirmed the decisions made by a smaller clique. <sup>41</sup>

There was feverish activity the evening of July 11 in the various headquarters; there were many rumors. The Pennsylv-

<sup>37</sup> White, Puritan in Babylon, 202

<sup>38</sup> Sullivan, 57

<sup>39</sup> White, Puritan in Babylon, 202

<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, 58

<sup>41</sup> Adams, 148

nia organization formulated plans for a Sproul parade; Senator Borah tried to push the candidacy of Knox, with Johnson as his running mate. To all offers of the vice-presidential slot, Johnson made the same answer: first place or nothing. Harding was discouraged, having lost a few of his initial meager array of votes.<sup>42</sup>

It was then that the senatorial cabal rolled into motion. Four of the unofficial steering committee dined together in George Harvey's suite 404 at the Blackstone Hotel: Senator Charles Curtis of Kansas, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts, Senator Frank Brandegee of Connecticut, and the host, who was neither a senator nor a delegate, and nominally still a Democrat.<sup>43</sup>

The four agreed that Wood and Lowden had deadlocked each other, and that the nomination would probably go to the first of the remaining candidates who could show strength after the deadlock was broken.<sup>44</sup> They opposed leaving the choice of this candidate to chance, preferring that one of their own selection should pick up the needed votes. After dinner there drifted in and out of the rooms, with the control of all important votes in their pockets, Senators New and Watson of Indiana, Wadsworth and Calder of New York, Weeks of Massachusetts, Reed Smoot of Utah, Medill McCormick of Illinois, plus Nicholas Murray Butler, Murray Crane and Joe Grundy. Prominent by their absence were Will Hays, Harry Daugherty, and the backers of Wood, Johnson and

42 Ibid., 150

43 Bailey, 305

44 Sullivan, 60

Lowden. They canvassed the poor pick of possibilities in gloom and uncertainty.

The names of Philander Knox, Governor Sproul, and others were rejected as not the figures to swing the convention. Senator Johnson's chances had been run to the ground by his bad tactics of tying himself into knots over the League and neglecting to outline a domestic policy. . . . Senator Borah had exhausted his influence in the battle to prevent Lowden or Wood from gaining sufficient votes to win the nomination. Charles Evans Hughes could probably win the East but his name was anathema in the West.

Robert LaFollette, of course, no Old Guardist could tolerate. He could go ahead, and flirt with the third parties if he dared. Herbert Hoover, . . . who had come to the convention something of an enigma though conceded to be an outstanding authority on European affairs, an expert executive, and an unsentimental, upright progressive, had been found to be an amateur in practical politics without any considerable convention support. Moreover, he had hedged on his party affiliation until the last minute, and then had declared himself a Republican in a flabby statement that left him straddling all issues. 46

Nicholas Murray Butler was a college president and the country had had enough of college presidents in the White House. Geography was against Coolidge, for he was too far east; besides, Senator Lodge opposed him, thereby blocking his choice as compromise. "Many believe that had Lodge come out in favor of Coolidge at the meeting at the Blackstone, the self-appointed senatorial committee would have accepted him."<sup>47</sup> No sooner was

45 Adams, 153

46 Bruce Minton and John Stuart, The Fat Years and the Lean, Modern Age Books Incorporated, New York, 1940, 33

47 Fuess, 257



a candidate mentioned for consideration than was something brought up which would militate against him. <sup>48</sup> Finally, and doubtfully, they discussed Harding or the possibility of adjourning the convention over Sunday. But it was hot, and the delegates wanted to go home, so a choice had to be made.

After going through the list of favorite sons again, it was agreed that Harding alone had the "full attributes of a-  
<sup>49</sup>  
 vailability."

Harding's qualifications were that he was good-looking, that he sounded significant, that he meant nothing, and that he came from Ohio. This last point was important. Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Harrison, McKinley, Taft -- most of the Republican Presidents had come from Ohio. It is not, unhappily, that only Ohio can produce the typical President; it is simply that Ohio, since the Civil War, has been a crucial state. Farther east, the Republicans felt safe; farther south, the Democrats were invincible; the West voted chiefly on the price of wheat, which could not easily be changed for the sake of the election; but Ohio was fairly evenly divided between the two parties, so Republicans usually chose a man who had shown that he could carry that state. 50

Ohio had elected Wilson four years before, and naturally it was supposed that the man who could carry Ohio could win the Presidency. That alone was a big asset in bringing Warren Harding forward as a candidate. Then too, Harding was a genial, well-liked man; and although no one was ever passionately fond of him,

48 Adams, 153

49 Edward M. Sait, American Parties and Elections, Century Company, New York, 1927, 478

50 Herbert Agar, The People's Choice, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1933, 307

he had no enemies. His charm and attractiveness seemed to be the key to his choice by the Old Guard. Probably the deciding factor was the belief that, as President, Harding would consult and cooperate with the elders of the Republican party in the Senate.

Perhaps Harding had not taken his candidacy seriously, but the party bosses had eyed him seriously in the weeks preceding the convention, as their first choice. True, they had turned from him after his poor showing in the Ohio primary, but now as a possibility he seemed stronger than ever. He was a regular politician, not one to kick over the traces; he was sound on the League issue, having voted for strong reservations. Admittedly he lacked originality and force of character, but these could be provided by the Senators.

A tentative decision having been reached, Harding was summoned before the group. George Harvey addressed him solemnly, saying:

We think you may be nominated tomorrow; before acting finally we think you should tell us, on your conscience and before God, whether there is anything that might be brought against you that would embarrass the party, any impediment that might disqualify you or make you inexpedient either as a candidate or as President.

Harding asked for time to think, and was shown to a vacant room.

During the ten minutes that he was in there, whether he considered his relations with Nan Britton or the rumor that there was

51 Charles Willis Thompson, Presidents I've Known and Two Near Presidents, Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis, 1929, 333

52 Sait, 310

53 Bailey, 303

54 Sullivan, 63

negro blood in the Harding family is unknown. What arguments Harding conjured up to defeat his conscience can only be guessed at; since, in a short time, he emerged and told Harvey and Brandegee that there was no impediment, no obstacle. At that moment he was as good as nominated. Messengers were sent to the other headquarters to report the result of the conference and to advise getting aboard the bandwagon. Both Wood and Lowden replied that they would wait to see what would happen on the convention floor the next day. Senator Smoot detailed how both Wood and Lowden would be given an opportunity to make a showing; then in the afternoon Harding would be brought forward and pushed to victory.

55

Consultations among the leaders at a convention were not unheard of. It often happened that, noticing a trend of the delegates, the leaders quickly jumped in to lead the procession. What made the conference of the leaders at the Republican National Convention of 1920 so famous was an astute, cynical prediction made by Harry Daugherty in February, before the convention met in June:

56

I don't expect Harding to be nominated on the first, second, or third ballot, but I think we can well afford to take chances that about eleven minutes after two o'clock on Friday morning at the convention, when fifteen or twenty men, somewhat weary, are sitting around a table, some one of them will say: "Who will we nominate?" At that decisive time the friends of Sen-

ator Harding can suggest him and can afford to abide by the result. I don't know but what I might suggest him myself. 57

Later Daugherty related that:

We were told afterwards that Colonel George Harvey met his friends in a smoke-fogged room in the Blackstone Hotel, decided on a candidate and adjourned at 2:00 A. M. We paid no attention to these meetings, but sought out and gripped the hands of the delegates who were to vote. Every man pledged to Harding was busy urging that the deadlock be broken and the Senator nominated. We argued that neither Wood or Lowden could be nominated and Lowden would release his followers the next day. 58

When the convention re-assembled Saturday morning, June 12, at ten o'clock, those in control had to be careful lest it seem as though they were responsible for eliminating either Wood or Lowden; the two candidates should eliminate each other so that there would be no danger of resentment among their respective supporters, except toward the opposite camp. In this way there would be no resentment against the nominee finally chosen. And so the first several ballots of the day were partly the natural result of the previous day's deadlock, and partly directed by the elders of the Republicans for face-saving and other desirable effects. 59 On the fifth ballot of the convention and the first Saturday morning, Lowden took the lead with 303 votes, while Wood dropped slightly to 299. On the next three ballots, Wood and Lowden were exactly even or nearly so, a fact which informed the two major candidates that neither could

57 White, Masks in a Pageant, 405

58 Daugherty, 44

59 Sullivan, 65

win.

After the eighth ballot, on which Harding had jumped to  $133\frac{1}{2}$  votes, his forces requested a recess. This move was surprising at a time when the Harding boom was gaining momentum; rather it might have been expected from the opposition forces in a last desperate effort to check the new threat.<sup>61</sup> Wood and Lowden, in contact by phone, agreed to force an adjournment until Monday, in the hope that by then some agreement could be reached between them. The recess had lasted overtime, and when Chairman Lodge mounted the platform to call the meeting to order, the delegate who was to make the motion for adjournment was nowhere<sup>62</sup> in the Coliseum, so the convention was called to order. The break came with the ninth ballot, when Harding piled up  $374\frac{1}{2}$  votes, and Wood and Lowden sank to 249 and  $121\frac{1}{2}$  respectively. Realizing that the bandwagon had started to roll, Governor Lowden, meeting Harding in the aisle, congratulated him on his imminent victory. The tenth ballot was conclusive, Harding polling  $692\frac{1}{2}$  votes, far ahead of his closest rival, Wood, with his 156. A motion to make the nomination unanimous was carried, despite the stubborn "nos" of the LaFollette delegates from Wisconsin.<sup>63</sup>

The vice-presidential nomination was expected to be an anti-climax, since Senator Irvine Lenroot of Wisconsin was commonly regarded as the choice of the same group that had pushed Harding through. The vice-presidential nomination became a re-

60 Ibid., 66

61 Adams, 160

62 Ibid., 162

63 Ibid., 163

volt. The delegates were aware that the convention had been dominated by the coterie of Senators, that the platform and major candidate had been chosen according to their wishes. So when for the third time the same group of Senators tried to dictate to the convention, the tired, hot, and politically disillusioned delegates balked and stampeded to a candidate of their own choosing, Calvin Coolidge. Senator Medill McCormick made the speech nominating Lenroot, and the seconding speeches followed. The presiding officer, Willis, then made the mistake of recognizing Judge Wallace McCamant, a delegate from Oregon, no doubt thinking that his would merely be another seconding speech. McCamant's voice carried over the din of the hall and he put in nomination " for the exalted office of Vice-President, Governor Calvin Coolidge of Massachusetts." <sup>64</sup>

All over the floor men rose to second the nomination of Coolidge. . . . Even Rummel of Arkansas, broke all precedents by withdrawing his second for Lenroot and turning it over to Coolidge. It was the first real stampede for many years in a Republican convention. <sup>65</sup>

The delegates turned spontaneously to Coolidge, a man the entire country thought well of. There was no indication that it was an engineered move; rather it was a gesture of defiance on the part of the delegates. The vote was 674 $\frac{1}{2}$  for Coolidge and 146 for Lenroot; and when the motion to make the nomination un- <sup>66</sup>animous was presented, it was just that, Wisconsin concurring.

64 Sullivan, 79  
65 Thompson, 327  
66 Adams, 166

Immediately there was a flood of comments on the two Republican nominations, ranging from one extreme to the other. Two men closely connected with the choice of Harding had this to say:

"This year we had a lot of second-raters. Harding is no world-beater. But he is the best of the second-raters." -- Senator

67

Brandeggee. Colonel George Harvey remarked: "He was nominated because there was nothing against him, and because the delegates

68

wanted to go home." Many political observers pointed to the lack of enthusiasm evinced by the delegates as proof that Harding

69

was the man they least had wanted. Perhaps it was because Harding was not the striking and outstanding figure the people had become accustomed to, as in the case of Theodore Roosevelt, and even Leonard Wood.

In an editorial on June 13, the New York Times wrote: The nomination of Harding, for whose counterpart we must go back to Franklin Pierce if we would seek a President who measures down to his political stature, is the fine and perfect flower of the cowardice and imbecility of the senatorial cabal. . . . Governor Coolidge for Vice-President really shines by comparison with the head of the ticket. He at least is a man of achievement, he is known to the party and to the nation. . . . It is fortunate that not one word is to be said against the character of either candidate. They are irreproachable. [!] But that does not compensate for the colorlessness of the candidate for first place, or for the manner in which his nomination was brought about. It will be felt and said everywhere that the Democrats at San Francisco have received from their opponents at Chicago

67 Ibid., 163

68 Agar, 308

69 Fuess, 262

the gift of a splendid opportunity. 70

The New York Tribune of June 14 had this to say:  
 We had hoped that a man of undoubted courage, vision and executive ability would be chosen, but we have instead Warren Gamaliel Harding, one of the Senate group which controlled the convention. It would be hypocritical for the Tribune to pretend that it is satisfied with this result. On the other hand, we believe in the Republican party, we believe in the Republican principles. We believe in this year's Republican platform, which is a well thought out, progressive and constructive document. We are more than pleased with the nomination of Calvin Coolidge, who has an inspiring record and who shows real promise of still greater accomplishments. 71

The Los Angeles Sunday Times for June 13 sounded a note of triumph:

In nominating Warren G. Harding of Ohio for President, the Republican National Convention has made a capital choice. Senator Harding is a good citizen -- and a good winner. . . . The Times has always believed that this is a Republican year. The nomination of Warren G. Harding of Ohio confirms that belief. The next President of the United States was named at Chicago yesterday. 72

The Chicago Tribune, with restraint, called Harding a "four square American, who had worked his way up from the humblest beginning," adding that he was a man of "unblemished character and many-sided experience, worthy of unhesitant confidence." 73

The Boston Evening Transcript editorialized on June 15:

- 70 New York Times, June 13, 1920  
 71 New York Tribune, June 14, 1920  
 72 Los Angeles Sunday Times, June 13, 1920  
 73 Chicago Tribune, June 13, 1920



In Senator Harding of Ohio. . . the Republican party has a candidate against whom no word of objection can be raised on the ground of character or of personal fitness. He is an experienced public man, of approved discretion. Even the one reproach that some have hastened to urge against him, namely, that he has followed the lead of the masters of the Senate, signifies in this case that he saved the country in a great emergency and kept the nation on an even keel of Americanism. . . . His record is clear and clean. He is a man of the people, strongly human, trained in the school of homely virtues, and expressive of our soundest spontaneous cultivation. . . . He appears worthy of the support which, after deliberate thought, the leaders and spokesmen of the party are cordially giving. 74

The New York Evening Post was perhaps the most bitter of all in its denunciation of the Republican ticket, saying:

The nomination of Senator Harding is an affront to the intelligence and conscience of the American people. In making it, the Republican party has put its worst foot forward. The public was prepared for a surprise at Chicago, but not for so disagreeable a surprise. Few observers expected the convention to nominate the best candidate presented to it, but nobody supposed that it would choose the worst. . . . None of the long list of names that have figured in the discussion of the nomination have received wider or more decided disapproval than his. He was the impossible candidate par excellence.

. . . The nomination is all the worse because it perfectly fits the platform. . . . But the Chicago convention with bovine consistency tops a feeble platform with a feeble candidate.

It is too early to say that the Democrats deserve to win in November,

but we have no hesitation in saying that the Republicans rightly deserve to lose. 75

The Outlook summed the choice up by saying that men of stronger character and personality and popular support were bypassed in order that a man fitted to cooperate with the Senators might be chosen. 76 Obviously few, if any, were deceived into thinking that Harding was a great choice. Harding himself had not taken his candidacy seriously; and there are those who claim that he honestly did not want the Presidency, but rather was pushed into it by ambitious friends. 77 Nevertheless, "Warren Harding was never the villain of the piece. Always he was the gentleman who comes on with his hat, his stick, his gloves, his smile, to do the dumb, impossible thing." 78 Months before the convention opened it was decided that the nomination must be prevented from going to General Wood at all costs, because he was too independent and apart from the regular party organization. Those active in politics are interested only in the success of those whom they have worked with and for; if an outsider wins the nomination and the election, all rewards go to non-regular supporters. 79

Some shrewd guessers pointed to Harding as the man with the best position: he was from a pivotal state, he was a Senator, he was liked for his conviviality, and above all he was

75 New York Evening Post, June 14, 1920

76 "The Republican Convention: Its Candidates and Platform," Outlook, June 23, 1920, 370

77 Sullivan, 73

78 White, Masks in a Pageant, 406

79 Page, 361

a mediocrity who could be easily led. To quote one commentator:  
 The Republicans must have been confident of victory to reach so far down into the sack for their standard-bearer. People were saying that the country was so fed up on Wilsonism that all the opposition had to do was to nominate a "rag baby" or a "yellow dog." They nominated Harding. 80

The lack of enthusiasm on the part of the delegates at the convention indicated that they, too, were familiar with the low mental stature of their nominee; nor could the silence be blamed altogether on the natural disappointment of the followers of Wood, Hoover, Lowden and the others. 81

The nomination of Coolidge was universally regarded as an excellent choice; and the remark was frequently made that the ticket might well have been reversed, with Coolidge as the principal candidate. The reason for his choice was not that he resided in a pivotal state nor that he possessed wealth; rather he was chosen because his name was synonymous with law and order, and because of his New England honesty and efficiency. 82 As far as the head of the ticket was concerned, Harding had wanted Hiram Johnson for his running mate; but Johnson refused, saying that if he could not have the presidential nomination, he preferred to remain in the Senate. 83 Had he swallowed his pride, the Senator from California might have achieved his life's am-

80 Bailey, 307

81 Oswald G. Villard, "The Unbossed Republican Convention," Nation, June 19, 1920, 820

82 John Clair Minot, "The Real Head of the Ticket," Independent, July 3, 1920, 27

83 Sullivan, 77

bition in 1923. There was a tinge of prophecy, or perhaps coincidence, in a remark reported by Frederick M. Davenport in the Outlook of June 23: a friend of Coolidge said "If Calvin Coolidge were nominated for the Vice-Presidency, I wouldn't take the Presidency for a million dollars." "Why?" asked the astonished Davenport. "Because I would die in a little while. Coolidge has always been lucky politically. Everything comes along to him in a most uncanny and mysterious way. Excuse me from the Presidency with him in the vice-regal chair."<sup>84</sup> Despite the cool feeling between Coolidge and the Senator from his state, Lodge, their official relations were smooth, even though Lodge was reputed to have said that he knew Calvin Coolidge only as long as it was necessary to know him.<sup>85</sup>

An additional side-light on the Coolidge nomination was that in later years, when Coolidge inherited the Presidency, he rewarded the man who had presented his name to the convention, McCamant, with an appointment to the federal bench; but, perhaps in revenge, the Old Guard of the Senate refused to confirm the appointment.<sup>86</sup> In his autobiography Coolidge stated that he was pleased to accept the nomination, and felt it best to gain national experience as Vice-President instead of being elected President first.<sup>87</sup> His official statement the day after the nomination was as follows:

The nomination for Vice-President, coming to me unsought and unexpect-

84 Frederick M. Davenport, "Conservative American in Convention Assembled," Outlook, June 23, 1920, 378

85 White, Puritan in Babylon, 177

86 Minton, 35

87 Coolidge, 147

tedly, I accept as an honor and a duty. It will be especially pleasing to be associated with my old friend Senator Warren G. Harding, our candidate for President. The Republican party had adopted a sound platform, chosen a wise leader and is united. It deserves the confidence of the American people. That confidence I shall endeavor to secure. 88

Among the various messages which poured into Coolidge's state house was one from Vice-President Thomas R. Marshall, a recognized wit, which read, "Please accept my sincerest sympathy." 89

It was pointed out that there were numerous "ifs" connected with the Republican convention: if Roosevelt were alive, would he have sought the nomination, and if not, would he have supported General Wood? if Johnson had agreed to become Vice-Presidential nominee, he would have become President instead of Coolidge; if the move to nominate Harding had failed Saturday afternoon, the convention would have adjourned until the following week; if the convention had been prolonged, the three likeliest candidates would have been Calvin Coolidge, Herbert Hoover, and Leonard Wood. 90 However, the convention had done its job with dispatch, if not enthusiasm; it had preserved party unity; and it was confident that it had just nominated the next President and Vice-President of the United States.

Harding issued to the press this statement, relative to his nomination: "I am very proud, as any American should be, 88 Los Angeles Times, June 12, 1920  
89 Fuess, 265  
90 Henry L. Stoddard, As I Knew Them, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1927, 463-466

27  
of receiving the great honor from the Republican party. I am not  
unmindful of the obligation and responsibility that go with it."<sup>91</sup>  
Possibly that very sense of obligation or debt later proved to be  
Harding's undoing, in that it entangled him with unscrupulous  
opportunists.

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91 Los Angeles Sunday Times, June 12, 1920 (Associated Press  
night wire)

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

Early in 1920, before the Republican Convention, it seemed that there was no chance for a Democratic victory in the November election, and there was an aura of gloom and dejection surrounding most of the party leaders. After noting the weak nomination by their rival at Chicago, Democratic spirits lifted and some began to talk confidently of victory at the polls.<sup>1</sup>

The Democrats had much to overcome: The Republicans were in the majority in the House and Senate; there was resentment and hostility aroused by the strict control necessary during the war years; the party leader, President Woodrow Wilson was ill and broken in the White House; and there was no figure in the party outstanding enough to be the unanimous choice as Wilson's successor.<sup>2</sup>

The biggest enigma of the pre-convention months was Woodrow Wilson, and the persistent rumors that he desired a third term. It is a lesson of history that few men who have experienced the prominence and power of the highest office in the land have been happy to leave the White House at the end of the term. Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Wilson, Coolidge, Hoover, all

<sup>1</sup> Minton, 37

<sup>2</sup> Frank R. Kent, The Democratic Party: A History, Century Company, New York, 1928, 436

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surrendered their position with reluctance. Moreover, these stung with the presidential bee never quite recover, even in the face of defeat, as is evidenced by William G. McAdoo, Al Smith, Alf Landon, Wendell Wilkie, and Thomas E. Dewey.<sup>4</sup>

The Democratic leaders tried to find the answers to these questions. Was Wilson angling for a third term? If it were offered, would he take it? Was Wilson physically able to serve it nominated? And not least in importance, would the country take kindly to a violation of the two-term tradition? The evidence pointed strongly to Wilson's desire for renomination since he did not publicly renounce the ambition. His Jackson Day letter, in which he called for a great and solemn referendum on the League issue by the voters, and the other public statements only served to emphasize the problem by ignoring it completely.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, he wished to make the League the issue of the election; and for such a campaign he would be the logical candidate.<sup>7</sup> In his autobiography, James M. Cox, the Democratic choice, generously stated that it was easy to understand why Wilson would like to remain in the White House and so carry his life's dream to success.<sup>8</sup>

Wilson's close friends were extremely concerned over the possibility of a third term.

On June 10 Postmaster General Burleson

<sup>3</sup> Josephus Daniels, Wilson Era: Years of War and After, 1917 - 1923, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1946, 537

<sup>4</sup> Daniels, 559

<sup>5</sup> Bailey, 308

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 309

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, 407

<sup>8</sup> James M. Cox, Journey Through My Years, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1946, 225



told Senator Glass. . . that in his judgment the President wanted another nomination. Earlier the same day Dr. Grayson the President's physician confided to Glass that "Wilson seriously contemplated a third term, but that such an ordeal "would kill him." Six days later Grayson again expressed to the senator the "greatest anxiety about the President's third term thoughts," for the exactions of the campaign alone would "probably kill him." Yet the faithful doctor believed that Wilson's sole concern was for the League. If reelected, he would resign after the adoption of the Covenant. Tumulty, records Glass, shared Grayson's concern about a third nomination. 9

On June 12 the Literary Digest published the results of its preconvention poll, which indicated that, despite his known physical disability, Wilson was popular with the rank and file Democrats. Leading the race was Wilson's son-in-law, ex-Secretary of the Treasury McAdoo; Wilson came second, but was well ahead of the other three leading Democratic hopefuls. Governor James M. Cox was last on the list, even though his progres-<sup>10</sup>sive administration of Ohio had evoked national attention.

In the interval between June 12 and the scheduled opening of the Democratic convention, June 29, Wilson made a surprising move. On June 15 Wilson had a three-hour interview with Louis Seibold, the Washington correspondent of the New York World.

The reporter found that Wilson had gained twenty pounds, and that his face was not much changed, except for lines of suffering. He

9 Bailey, 312

10 Earl McChrifgiesser, This Was Normalcy, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1948, 39

was still a bit lame, but -- and this was a revealing touch -- his leg did not drag so badly as that of General Wood, who had led on the early balloting in Chicago. . . . The Seibold interview, which was subsequently published on the morning of June 18, was a front-page sensation, and subsequently won for its author a coveted Pulitzer prize. 11

A leading Washington photographer, George W. Harris, spent an hour with Wilson, June 19, taking numerous photographs of the revitalized President. To reporters Harris said that Wilson looked better than he had expected, but that the pictures could speak for themselves. 12 It could hardly be a coincidence that the pictures, taken from Wilson's unparalyzed right side, were released a week before the Democratic convention convened in San Francisco, ample time for them to be printed in Pacific Coast newspapers. 13

It is difficult to believe that all these developments were unrelated to the approaching Democratic convention. Newspaper correspondents do not ordinarily interview the President alone; they do not ordinarily interview a sick President for three hours; and after the interview is over they do not ordinarily hover about, gazing at the President while he signs documents and transacts other business. All this does not prove -- though some newspapers concluded as much -- that Wilson was pulling wires for a third nomination. But it seems to indicate that on the eve of the Democratic convention he was eager to appear before the country as substantially recovered

11 Bailey, 310

12 Ibid., 311

13 Ibid.

and able to discharge with old-time vigor the duties of his high office. 14

It was suggested that perhaps Wilson wanted nothing more than a courtesy nomination, flattering but at the same time easy to decline. But the consensus was that he was flirting with a nomination of some kind, since he did nothing to discourage a move in that direction. Critics of the Wilson administration remarked that it would be only just to re-nominate him, since no other person should be asked to shoulder the burden of his mistakes. 15 Seeing Senator Glass off on the convention-bound train, Dr. Grayson and Tumulty asked him whether Wilson had said anything about a third term; when the Senator said no, Grayson again begged Glass to save the life and fame of the President by opposing any move to "draft" Wilson. 16 At the last minute Wilson insisted that Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby attend the convention as delegate from the District of Columbia; Wilson hoped that he would then be chosen permanent chairman, possibly in the hope that Colby could stampede the delegates to Wilson by presenting his name at the opportune time in a brilliant and stirring oration. 17

A further complication in the problem facing the Democrats prior to the convention was Wilson's steadfast refusal to declare himself in favor of any of the leading contenders. However, if he did want the third term himself, his position was

14 Ibid.

15 Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Ghosts at San Francisco," Nation, June 26, 1920, 846

16 Bailey, 313

17 Ibid.

only consistent. The strongest candidate was William Gibbs McAdoo, Wilson's son-in-law and ex-Secretary of the Treasury. McAdoo had many advantages: the Treasury portfolio had brought him in contact with many people not engaged in politics, through the War Bond drives; while he was in charge of the railroads he had been fair with labor, thus winning their support; he possessed great personal charm and the ability to deal with men. Nevertheless, his candidacy was handicapped by his personal ties with Wilson, with the foolish cries of "Crown Prince;" and to a lesser degree, his southern birth and training. The same day that the Seibold interview with Wilson was released, McAdoo made public in New York a letter withdrawing from the race.

He declared that he would not accept the nomination, asserted that his decision was irrevocable, said that he could not himself afford to make the campaign if nominated, and that he would not permit his friends to furnish the money. He had resigned from the cabinet he said in order to "rehabilitate" his family and could not at the same time make the sacrifices the nomination would call for. 21

McAdoo denied that he withdrew with the prior knowledge of Wilson; but it appeared as if he were clearing the way for his father-in-law. However, McAdoo's loyal supporters made plans to have his name presented to the convention regardless, apparently hoping for a popular demand to "draft" McAdoo for the nomination. But

it could not be denied that the unequivocal refusal of McAdoo

18 Dunn, 407

19 Henry Minor, The Story of the Democratic Party, Macmillan Company, New York, 1928, 455

20 Ibid., 456

21 Kent, 445

22 Bailey, 319

23 Kent, 446

made for confusion among the delegates; and it was conceded that but for the statement, McAdoo would have had the Democratic nomination.<sup>24</sup>

Except for President Wilson's attitude, Mr. McAdoo would in all probability have been named. He was the strongest candidate; yet his position of openly refusing the honor while his supporters were actively promoting his interest was one that necessarily spelled defeat; and into this position he was forced by the President's scarcely concealed ambition to succeed himself.<sup>25</sup>

The second choice of the pre-convention guessers was A. Mitchell Palmer, a Quaker who had refused to be Wilson's Secretary of War and had been named instead as Attorney-General. His activities in that post, especially his campaign against enemy aliens, gave him strength and some popularity; although there were those who accused him of "Red-baiting."<sup>26</sup> Palmer had the lofty ambition of being Wilson's personal choice as successor; he visited Wilson to learn if the President had a preference, in which case Palmer would support the choice. Palmer was informed that Wilson was strictly neutral.<sup>27</sup> In a conversation with Senator Carter Glass ten days before the convention opened, Wilson indicated that he favored the nomination of Palmer, saying he would make "a good President but a weak candidate."<sup>28</sup> It was well-known that Wilson was not sympathetic towards McAdoo's ambitions, having said to Postmaster Burleson in November of 1918

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 445

<sup>25</sup> World's Work, September, 1920, 426

<sup>26</sup> Minor, 455

<sup>27</sup> Kent, 444

<sup>28</sup> Schriftgiesser, 41

that whether or not McAdoo wanted to run for the office, he was not fit for the presidency.  
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Of all the leading candidates Cox was the most objectionable to Wilson, since he was neither a member of the administration team, nor outspokenly enthusiastic about the League of Nations.

When Senator Glass had mentioned his name at the White House on June 19, Wilson had broken in, "Oh! you know Cox's nomination would be a joke." 30

Wilson's refusal to speak regarding his choice as successor could have been caused by any of three reasons. First, he wanted the nomination himself. Second, he favored McAdoo but a sense of delicacy forbade open support. Lastly, Wilson favored one of the other candidates, but a sense of loyalty to his son-in-law induced him to remain silent.  
31  
When he entertained the chairman and other members of the Democratic National Committee at the White House, May 31, 1920, Wilson made it clear that he had no preference for the nomination; but he insisted on an unqualified endorsement of his foreign policy.  
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It was apparent before the convention assembled that the big political bosses -- Charles F. Murphy of Tammany, George Brennan of Illinois, Thomas Taggart of Indiana -- were strongly  
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opposed to Falmer, and inclined toward Cox as the logical choice.

They were determined to nominate a "wet" candidate, and one who

29 Daniels, 553

30 Bailey, 319

31 Ibid, 311

32 Dodd, 412

33 Kent, 450

would take orders, unlike Wilson. The political bosses met at a preliminary conference at French Lick Springs, Indiana, and made concerted plans to cripple the power of Wilson and to save the country from women voters and prohibition, which they called "dry rot."<sup>34</sup> Thus when the deadlocked convention turned to the political leaders to pick a man, the machines were ready.

When the Democratic National Convention opened at San Francisco on June 29, 1920, three factions were fighting for control. First there was the Administration group, the wilsonites, composed of all who were "sound" on the League issue; but even Wilson had more than once said that the people never purposely elected him their leader, although he maintained that the great majority of Americans favored his policies.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, a majority of the Democratic state conventions had failed to endorse Wilson, his administration, or his stand on the League.<sup>36</sup>

The Administration group was split on choice of candidate, since two of the candidates, McAdoo and Calmer, could claim the support of the Federal office holders. "Ordinarily officeholders at a national convention are grouped under one banner, but the mysterious silence of Wilson left these heroes of the pay roll free to follow the flag of the man they served or had served."<sup>37</sup> The second group at the convention were the bosses of the northern industrial cities, who wanted the League question in the background, and who wanted the repeal of prohibition and Irish independence

34 Dodd, 412

35 Ibid., 416

36 Bailey, 308

37 Dunn, 409

as the major issue. The third element at the convention were the supporters of William Jennings Bryan, a small group which was determined to force a "dry" plank in the platform, and which was not in complete sympathy with Wilson's position on the League of Nations.

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The Democratic convention differed from the Republican in that it had more than the 984 delegates assembled at Chicago; the Democratic delegates had to vote as a unit, while the Republicans could vote individually; and finally, a two-thirds majority was required for the Democratic nomination, while the Republican nominee had needed only a simple majority.

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Homer Cummings of Connecticut brought the convention to order, and the banging of his gavel was the signal for the unveiling of a huge, illuminated and flag-draped picture of Wilson. The delegates and spectators burst into a spontaneous Wilson demonstration which lasted for twenty minutes, but the Tammanyites sat silent and unmoving rather than pay tribute to a man they never liked. Finally Boss Murphy gave the word to join and Franklin Delano Roosevelt went to where Jeremiah Mahoney was guarding the New York standard. When Mahoney refused to let go, Roosevelt seized the standard and heaved with all his strength, jerking Mahoney to his feet. The state standard now free, Roosevelt led the New York delegates into the Wilson ranks.

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When order was restored, Cummings, the keynoter, presented the Wilson-endorsed speech vigorously and militantly.

38 Bailey, 314

39 "The National Convention," Outlook, June 9, 1920, 245

40 Alden Hatch, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, an Informal Biography, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1947, 118



The President, he shouted, had been "physically wounded" by his enemies just as Lincoln, Garfield, and Mc Kinley had been. Wilson was not opposed to reservation but to "nullification." The League was the paramount issue; and the "only trouble with the treaty is that it was negotiated by a Democratic President."

. . . He called the roll of the nations who had joined the League and asked if his audience wanted to hear the list of those who had not joined. "Yes, yes, tell us," came from all parts of the floor. "Revolutionary Mexico, Bolshevik Russia, unspeakable Turkey, and -- the United States of America." 41

In the organization of the convention the Wilsonites won only a partial victory. Senator Glass, fresh from the White House, was made chairman of the platform-drafting committee, but Bainbridge Colby, the President's choice for the post, was defeated as permanent chairman, and the Senate bloc was able to secure the chairmanship for its colleague, Senator Robinson of Arkansas.

42 The Democratic platform will be discussed in a later chapter along with that of the Republican party. In an effort to speed up the convention, nominating speeches were delivered while the platform committee was doing its work in private. The perplexity of the delegates was reflected in the fact that there were fourteen candidates nominated and twenty-three voted for on the first ballot. At the start there were four leading contenders: William G. McAdoo, A. Mitchell Palmer, James M. Cox, and Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York; while each had considerable

41 Bailey, 315

42 Schriftgiesser, 44

43 Ibid., 46

strength, none could command the necessary two-thirds early in  
<sup>43</sup>  
 the race.

Cox's campaign manager, Edmond H. Moore, had devised a strategy reminiscent of his fellow Ohioan, Harry Daugherty. Aware of the political unfriendliness between McAdoo and Palmer and their near equality in strength, Moore knew that they would never join forces to break the inevitable deadlock; therefore he worked tirelessly to win for Cox the second-choice votes of the  
<sup>44</sup>  
 promised delegates. On the morning of the third day of the convention, nominations began. Justice James G. Johnson of the Ohio Supreme Court presented Cox's name, dwelling on the fact that while Ohio was normally a Republican state, Cox had been elected  
<sup>45</sup>  
 Governor three times. Kentucky and Mississippi seconded the nomination. McAdoo was placed in nomination by Dr. Burriss A. Jenkins of Kansas City, since no New York delegate was willing to do it. The demonstration by McAdoo's supporters angered Palmer, and from then on there was no hope for cooperation between the  
<sup>46</sup>  
 two rival contenders.

Of the sixteen candidates voted on, only McAdoo, Palmer and Cox had any real strength, the standing on the first ballot being: McAdoo, 266 votes, Palmer, 256, and Cox, 134. Among the dark horses, Al Smith of New York was in fourth place with 109; John W. Davis and Carter Glass received 32 and 26 $\frac{1}{2}$

43 Ibid., 46

44 Cox, 226

45 Ibid., 228

46 Kent, 451

votes respectively. There was little material change until the tenth ballot; then New York dropped Smith and swung to Cox, who momentarily moved ahead of Palmer. Cox was ahead of both McAdoo and Palmer on the twelfth ballot; and the lead continued to fluctuate, with no single candidate showing enough strength to start the bandwagon rolling. The twenty-second ballot saw Cox in the lead with 430 votes, McAdoo next with  $372\frac{1}{2}$ , and Palmer beginning to falter, mustering only  $166\frac{1}{2}$ . But the required two-thirds majority continued to elude the hopefuls. <sup>47</sup> On the thirty-fourth ballot Cox polled  $420\frac{1}{2}$ , McAdoo  $379\frac{1}{2}$ ; thirty-sixth, Cox 371, McAdoo  $424\frac{1}{2}$ ; by the thirty-ninth ballot Cox had again taken the lead, with 468 votes. That ballot was generally regarded as the turning point, since Palmer slid downward rapidly, but refused to throw his votes to McAdoo. Cox was within four votes of the majority on the forty-second ballot, polling  $540\frac{1}{2}$  votes; McAdoo had 427. The McAdoo forces vainly tried for an adjournment at this juncture, but the weary delegates, sensing that the end was near, voted the proposal down. On the next count, Cox dropped slightly to 518, with 412 for his rival; and on the forty-fourth ballot Cox totaled  $732\frac{1}{2}$ , while McAdoo polled only 267. The convention moved that Cox be declared the unanimous choice of the meeting, at the suggestion of a delegate from Kansas. <sup>48</sup>

On July 2, a crucial point in the convention, Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby wired Wilson in secret code, that, unless otherwise instructed, he would present Wilson's name to

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "The Democratic Convention: Its Candidate and Platform," Outlook, July 14, 1920, 487

the convention to be drafted. A telephoned reply from Wilson recommended a meeting of all the Cabinet members then in San Francisco, plus other Democratic leaders, to discuss a course of action and inform Wilson of their conclusions. All of those present resented Colby's actions, since they felt that a third nomination for Wilson most unwise, both from a standpoint of practical politics, and the President's delicate health. They wired Wilson that Colby's suggestion should not be carried out, and the

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matter was dropped. Wilson never again referred to the matter, although it was reported that when the Cabinet members returned to Washington, Wilson was extremely cool toward them. However, he might have been annoyed by the fact that, in spite of the tremendous ovation his portrait had received, he did not get even a complimentary nomination, and that he had received only two votes during the entire convention, and those on the twenty-second

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ballot.

What were the circumstances which chose Cox to break the deadlock? In the first place, the stubborn silence from the White House, although it was widely believed that Wilson could have nominated anyone, had he given the delegates a clue as to his preference. William Jennings Bryan might have broken the deadlock had he endorsed McAdoo, but to do that would have been to endorse Wilson, and that Bryan refused to do. It was sug-

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gested that Palmer and McAdoo could have joined forces; however,

49 Daniels, 555

50 Bailey, 319

51 Ibid.

52 Kent, 437

53 Dodd, 415

It was pointed out that at no time did their combined vote approach the necessary two-thirds.<sup>54</sup> Surveying the field of dark horses, the Democrats had less from which to pick a compromise candidate than had the Republicans at Chicago. The candidacies of Champ Clark and Bryan were too shopworn;<sup>55</sup> Al Smith was too young and too weak politically; John W. Davis could stir up no enthusiasm; and Bainbridge Colby was suggested as a possibility only when the move to Cox was too strong to divert.<sup>56</sup> All the confusion and uncertainty meant that the choice would have to be made by the party bosses -- Murphy, Brennan and Taggart; men whom Wilson had ridiculed a hundred times in his writings and ignored during his administration.<sup>57</sup> In a hotel suite, but much more openly than its counterpart in Chicago, the bosses selected Cox as the best choice. The reasons for their choice were most apparent:

. . . though he had backed the Wilson administration, he had not been identified with it and could not be held responsible for its conduct; he had played no part in the quarrels over the League of Nations, and hence he accumulated no enemies on that score; he was wet enough to assure the anti-prohibition forces but not sufficiently wet to antagonize the dries; he had a progressive record, had proved his ability to carry on the Democratic ideal of liberalism and government for the people.<sup>58</sup>

One commentator of the period observed that Cox was nominated

<sup>54</sup> Cox, 225

<sup>55</sup> Minton, 40

<sup>56</sup> Daniels, 557

<sup>57</sup> Dodd, 415

<sup>58</sup> Irving Stone, They Also Ran, Doubleday, Doran, and Company, Garden City, New York, 1945, 28

for one reason only: he was from Ohio. The Democrats had apparently decided that the way to beat a Republican Ohioan was with a Democrat from the same pivotal state.

If Warren Harding had not been nominated at Chicago, James Cox might not have been nominated at San Francisco. Thus he would have missed what he considered the climax of his life; he also would have missed his greatest drubbing, and might not have passed from public life at the early age of fifty. 60

The nomination was made at 1:50 A. M., Tuesday, July 6, after the convention had been in continuous session for eighteen hours. Cox did not attend the convention, maintaining that a candidate for the presidency had no business participating in the turbulence of the convention. 61 He received the returns over

the telegraph in the office of his Dayton News. Immediately Cox dispatched a message to the Chairman of the convention, Senator Robinson, which read as follows:

Let me thank you for your felicitous message. I shall accept the standard from the Democracy of America conscious not only of the honor but the great responsibility conferred. As Providence gives to me of strength and vision my firm resolve will be to justify the confidence which has been officially expressed. The shrine of government is in the communities of the land near to the homes that have given service and sacrifice. To them we will carry our cause with the assurance that the faith shall be kept. Please convey to the delegates of the convention my grateful acknowledgment. . . . 62

- 59 Dunn, 408  
 60 Stone, 28  
 61 Cox, 227  
 62 Ibid., 234

A sidelight on the Cox nomination from the point of view of political science, was that the Democrats betrayed the psychology of a party out of power or at least fearful of their record while in power. Ordinarily the party in power and therefore responsible for the policies of the federal government, will nominate a candidate who had been closely associated with the conduct of national affairs. The nomination is thus looked upon as an endorsement of the party's record. The opposition party, on the other hand, will usually nominate a candidate who had little or nothing to do with the federal government; thereby hoping to rally around their choice all dissatisfied political interests. When the Democrats nominated the governor of the state of Ohio in 1920 it could be regarded as a repudiation of the administration of Wilson; just as the Republican nomination of Governor Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio in 1876 was a repudiation of Grant's two terms as President.

Congratulatory messages came pouring in to Cox from a variety of sources: President Wilson wired congratulations and best wishes, as did Josephus Daniels, Bernard Baruch, Champ Clark and even William Cooper Proctor, Wood's campaign manager. In his telegram, Warren Harding remarked that Cox's victory reminded him of a newspaper cartoon which portrayed the two as rival newsboys vying for the White House delivery. Cox replied: "I accept your message as an evidence of the fraternal impulse which has always characterized the craft to which you and I belong. I

63 Arthur N. Holcombe, The Political Parties of Today, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1925, 302

64 Cox, 235

heartily reciprocate the felicitous spirit which you have expressed." <sup>65</sup> Harding also released a statement to the papers, in which he said:

Governor Cox's nomination is an added consideration shown to our great state of Ohio, for which I am glad, and gives reasonable assurance that finally a newspaper man is to be made the nation's chief executive.

Ohio has accorded to Governor Cox very unusual distinction and he deserved his notable victory at San Francisco. His nomination will not in any way change our activities in Ohio.

It is a great party contest before us, to be fought on great principles involved and neither place of residence nor personality will have any marked influence on the result. <sup>66</sup>

As in the case of the Republican nomination newspaper comment was divided, usually on a partisan basis. The New York Tribune declared:

The nomination of James Middleton Cox is due to the circumstance that he was the "wettest" candidate in sight; to the desire to get as far away from Wilsonism as possible, and to the fact that the nominee is from Ohio. . . . The representatives of the President were dutifully allowed to write . . . a White House platform. The delegates politely cheered the name of Wilson, but the great majority of them then tried to forget the horrors of the last four years. At Washington it was un concealed that the Administration preferred anyone to Mr. Cox. <sup>67</sup>

The Chicago Tribune, in an editorial on July 7, stated that Brennan of Illinois, Murphy of Tam-

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 237

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Editorial: "The Cox Nomination," New York Tribune, July 7, 1920



many, Taggart of Indiana, and other practical Jeffersonians nominated Governor Cox of Ohio because they thought he was the best vote getter and goat getter the Democracy had. . . . Mr. Wilson's dynasty is dead, but his ideas have a political party behind them. Mr. Cox is the best evasion of awkward declarations the party could find. . . . 68

The New York Evening Post editorialized:

Of the three leading candidates at San Francisco the Governor of Ohio was easily the most desirable. In ability he measures up well with his two rivals, and he is free from the despotic temperament of Palmer and a certain irresponsibility that attaches to McAdoo. . . . The conventions have left us with no sharply defined issues between parties and without sharply contrasting candidates. They have but rolled up the curtain and disclosed the protagonists. Independents everywhere will await the unfolding of the drama. 69

The Boston Evening Transcript declared that Cox was

A man of good second-rate abilities. . . . On every broad national question he is an untried man -- and all that is known of his views and his tendencies is not to his credit. His financial and social views are not supposed to be radical, but they are nevertheless altogether unsafe. . . . On a weak and dangerous platform the Democrats have nominated an essentially unsafe man for President. 70

The Los Angeles Times of July 7 observed that since Cox and

Harding held nearly the same views on the League issue, the

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outcome of the election would depend on other factors.

68 Editorial: "Cox Facing both Ways," Chicago Tribune, July 7, 1920

69 New York Evening Post, July 6, 1920

70 Boston Evening Transcript, July 6, 1920

71 Los Angeles Times, July 7, 1920

The Democratic New York Times was unstinting in its praise:

The Democrats enter the campaign with a candidate worthy of the noble and compelling cause which they are resolved shall triumph through their victory at the polls. Their platform, their purpose, their candidate are in harmony. . . .

Governor Cox combines notable elements of strength as a candidate. He is a man of the people, that fine type of the successful American man of affairs who has risen from humble beginnings by his own unaided industry, native ability and sound judgment to the possession of a competence and to high offices. . . . He is no champion of privilege any more than he is an apostle of revolution. . . . He has made an enemy of no class, for he is a national man; he comes naturally and deservedly to the rank of a national figure. 72

The Christian Science Monitor pointed out that the two Democratic candidates were not well-balanced geographically, since the ticket would have little appeal in the West. Possibly it was an indication that the Democratic Party was returning to its old campaign strategy of relying upon the Solid South and the central and eastern states for election victory. 73

The New York World reported that "President Wilson and every Administration leader in Washington are greatly pleased with the nomination of Governor Cox;" and Wilson's secretary, Joseph Tumulty was quoted as saying that "the leaders of the party have never been so optimistic of

72 Editorial: "The Cause and the Candidate," New York Times, July 7, 1920

73 Editorial: "The San Francisco Nominations," Christian Science Monitor, July 8, 1920

success as they are today as a result of the nomination of Governor Cox." <sup>74</sup> The periodical, World's Work, noted that for the

first time in fifty years the influence of Tammany Hall in the selection of the Democratic candidate was an asset rather than a liability. <sup>75</sup>

Franklin Delano Roosevelt was present at the San Francisco convention to do what he could to win the nomination for Al Smith, Governor of New York. There were two versions relative to his choice as Governor Cox's running mate. The first was that of Cox:

The delegates were inquiring of him [Moore, the campaign manager] my preference for vice-president. I told him that I had given the matter some thought and that my choice would be Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York. I did not know him. In fact, so far as I knew, I had never seen him; but I explained to Mr. Moore that he met the geographical requirement, that he was recognized as an Independent, and that Roosevelt was a well-known name. <sup>76</sup>

Because Roosevelt's dealings with Tammany had not always been friendly, Moore consulted with Charles Murphy, the head of the New York machine. He informed him of Cox's choice, but said that if it were offensive to Tammany, Edward P. Meredith of Iowa

<sup>77</sup>

could be selected instead. Murphy replied: I don't like Roosevelt. He is not well-known in the country, but Ed, this is the first time a Democratic nominee for the presidency has shown me courtesy. That's why I would vote for the devil himself if Cox wanted

<sup>74</sup> Stone, 29

<sup>75</sup> World's Work, August, 1920, 315

<sup>76</sup> Cox, 232

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

me to. Tell him we will nominate Roosevelt on the first ballot as soon as we assemble. 78

The second, and probably more reliable version, was that Roosevelt, as Cox before him, was the choice of the Democratic party leaders. They knew that their chief candidate was weak and that the ticket needed strengthening by a strong Vice-Presidential candidate. Roosevelt was from a pivotal state; moreover, he represented the Wilson wing of the party. For these reasons, and with the approval of Cox, Judge Timothy T. Ansberry of the District of Columbia put the name of Franklin D. Roosevelt before the convention. Al Smith made a seconding speech, as did delegates from Kansas and Indiana. Thereupon former Governor David R. Francis of Missouri moved that, as all vice-presidential nominations had been withdrawn except one, Franklin D. Roosevelt be nominated by acclamation. The motion was carried unanimously.

It is an unwritten law that candidates nominated for the presidency or vice-presidency must await their acceptance until notified by a committee, and time is given to prepare an acceptance speech to be used as a campaign document. That precedent came near being broken when Franklin Roosevelt was nominated for Vice President. He was sitting in the New York delegation when the nomination was made, and he beat a hasty retreat as calls were made for him to go to the platform. He had not then

78 Ibid.

79 F.D.R.: His Personal Letters, Vol. II, (1905 - 1928), edited by Elliott Roosevelt, assisted by James N. Rosenau, Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, New York, 1948, 488

80 Cox, 232

become so great a breaker of traditions and precedent as when he became President. 81

Roosevelt's biographer related that Franklin had no illusions about victory; rather he realized that the nomination might be his political grave. He was greatly touched by the confidence the delegates manifested in him; and while he had realized that his nomination was a possibility, he had never dreamed it would come as a spontaneous, unanimous tribute. 82

Roosevelt was one of the youngest men ever to be put forward for the Vice-Presidency; 1916 would have been the earliest possible time at which he could have been chosen for the office, and even then he would have been under the age limit of thirty-five when elected, though a few weeks past the minimum by the date of inauguration. 83

Besides being young and vigorous, Roosevelt was handsome, personable, intelligent, and an able speaker. But perhaps the weightiest factor in his favor was his well-known name, even though the Republican branch of the family was chagrined with his Democratic connections. 84

Nearly every publication in the country commended the Democrats on the choice of their second standard-bearer. Harvey's Weekly, which was sparing of compliments to anyone connected with Wilson, declared: "Mr. Roosevelt deserves to go far in public life, and will, even though he does have to suffer defeat next Fall." 85. The Outlook remarked that there were few men in the

81 Daniels, 554

82 Hatch, 119

83 "What a Democratic Roosevelt Looks Like, Has Done, and wants to Do," Current Opinion, September 1920, 320

84 Bailey, 318

85 Ibid

Democratic party as fit for the presidency as Roosevelt;

World's Work observed that he was a man well worth watching politically.  
87

The New York Times was enthusiastic in its comments: And the fine record which he has made at Albany and at Washington, together with the impression which he has given to the public of uniting unusual intelligence with sterling character, renders the ticket of Cox and Roosevelt one full of strength and promise. The convention could not have made a better choice. 88

The Republican Chicago Tribune was quick to point out Franklin's remote link with his more famous cousin, Theodore. In an editorial entitled "The, at least, Fifth Cousin," it stated:

In nominating Franklin Delano Roosevelt for vice-president the Democrats swiped a great name, but did not nominate a great candidate. . . . Franklin Roosevelt had the patience to put up with his superior, Joseph Daniels, which is enough to indicate that he was either indifferent or uninformed. . . . It may have seemed good politics to get the name of Roosevelt on the Democratic ticket, but the pretender ought to have more of a front. If he gets a puncture he'll leak sawdust. 89

The Los Angeles Times commented that Roosevelt added no strength to the Democratic ticket, and that he was a radical of unsafe  
90

tendencies. The Poughkeepsie Eagle, with the divided feelings of Republican affiliation and local pride, declared in an editorial  
86 Outlook, July 14, 1920, 494

87 John VanBibber, "Franklin D. Roosevelt," World's Work, September, 1920, 452

88 Editorial: "Roosevelt for Vice-President," New York Times, July 7, 1920

89 Chicago Tribune, July 8, 1920

90 Los Angeles Times, July 7, 1920

torial that "Roosevelt is a nice young man but that he cannot win in a year when parties and principles and not individuals are the important considerations. His nomination was a compliment; his defeat is a certainty."<sup>91</sup>

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91 F.D.R. Letters, 492

## CHAPTER III

### Splinter Groups and Their Candidates

If ever there was a time when a third party was doomed to failure, it was in the reaction of 1920. The Bull Moose fiasco of 1912, furthermore, had convinced many that there was no salvation to be had from a political party which lacked the organization, funds, and experience necessary for an election victory. However, a few of the splinter parties went through the motions of a national convention to nominate two candidates and erect a platform for the Presidential election of 1920.

For many years the Socialist party espoused the cause of change by evolution, the belief that somehow, sometime capitalism would recognize the error of its ways and reform itself.<sup>1</sup> But in the turmoil of the postwar decade, a group within the party, calling itself the Militants, urged that vigorous steps be taken to alter the status quo; the right-wing faction, the Reformists, was in control of the party councils, and as a result the Socialist party talked more than it acted. Indeed, it seemed as though the party had begun to avoid both workers and laborers, concentrating on the malcontents and intellectuals it had garnered from the two major parties, to build up the membership which had declined during the World

War.<sup>2</sup> In 1919 the Socialist leader, Victor Berger, denounced the Russian Revolution as vehemently as had Woodrow Wilson and

<sup>1</sup> Schriffgiesser, 59

<sup>2</sup> ibid., 60



he urged the Socialists to ignore the class struggle in order that they might bring about reforms closer to home. So divergent were the opinions of its members in 1919, that the Socialist party was forced to call an emergency convention in order to settle matters once and for all. In the midst of the wrangling at the meeting, several factions walked out and planned to hold their own conventions. One group formed the so-called Communist party, controlled by leaders of Russian extraction and looking to the Kremlin for advice as to their political strategy and tactics. A second party formed from the Socialists was the Communist Labor Party, also looking to Moscow for guidance, but less radical than the Communist party.<sup>3</sup> The first convention of the Communist Labor Party was shrouded in secrecy, because of Attorney-General Palmer's drive against the Reds; the spot was "somewhere between the Atlantic and the Pacific and the Gulf and the Great Lakes."<sup>4</sup> There the Communist Labor Party decided to merge with the Communist Party; the result of this union was called the United Communist Party. Realizing its weakness, the Communist Party nominated no candidate to run in the 1920 election.

The majority of the Socialists remained loyal to their original organization, and at a convention meeting in New York in May, 1920, nominated their perennial candidate, Eugene V. Debs. The leader of the Socialists heard of his nomination in his cell at the federal penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas, where he was

<sup>3</sup> Holcombe, 328

<sup>4</sup> Schriftgiesser, 61

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serving a ten-year sentence<sup>5</sup> for the violation of the wartime Espionage Act. To tour these country in Debs' place and to carry the burden of the campaign<sup>6</sup>, the Socialists nominated Seymour Stedman of Chicago as Vice—Presidential candidate. Despite his confinement, Debs conducted a campaign. He did get his pictures into the newspapers, and a few of them printed his statements. However, on the whole, the press of the country ignored Debs and his party.

The Socialist platform was drawn up by the more conservative elements of the party<sup>7</sup>. It termed the League of Nations a "mischievous organization;"<sup>8</sup> but it urged immediate recognition of Russia, the signing of the peace treaties, and it opposed militarism in any form. According to its domestic program, the platform called for the direct election and recall of both the President and Vice-President, the selection of the Cabinet by Congress, and the recall of federal judges. It further advocated the nationalization of all commercial business done on a national scale, a single tax on rental value of land, the payment of war debts by a progressive tax on war profits, and the establishment of a shorter working day by federal decree. As is usual in the party platforms, it castigated the Republican and Democratic parties as enemies of liberty.

The results of the election, in which the Socialists polled only 914,980 votes out of a total 26,500,000 cast, revealed some significant changes in the distribution of Socialist

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Minton, 45

<sup>7</sup> Schriftgiesser, 62

strength. Prior to the World War the party had been strongest <sup>56</sup>  
in the Far West; by 1920 the party was stronger among the city-  
dwellers of the Northeast, and the greatest gains had been made  
in districts largely inhabited by foreign-born workers of  
Russian extraction. <sup>8</sup>

In both major parties there were considerable progress-  
ive men and women, principally from the middle class, who were  
far from satisfied; a group of them banded together, calling  
themselves the Committee of Forty-eight, and sent appeals to  
various groups throughout the country to attend a gathering set  
for July, in Chicago. The first response was from the Non-  
Partisan League, a group which had made political inroads in the  
corn and wheat regions of the North Central States, since 1915.  
The League's enemies denounced it as an agrarian soviet; but  
actually it worked among those groups which had not yet been  
organized by the labor unions. It opposed private monopoly,  
advocating instead public or state ownership of the mills and  
warehouses to which its members shipped their produce. Offering  
its support to candidates of either established party who  
sponsored its views, the Nonpartisan League had elected the  
governor and the majority of the legislature of North Dakota,  
besides seating many state legislators in South Dakota, Minne-  
sota, Idaho and Nebraska. <sup>9</sup>

When the first call for cooperation reached labor,  
Samuel Gompers forbade members of the American Federation of  
Labor to attend the projected conference. A few of the unionists

<sup>8</sup> Holcombe, 329

<sup>9</sup> Schriftgiesser, 63

defied Gompers' instructions, called their own convention and 57  
became the National Labor Party, changing the name later to  
Farmer-Labor.<sup>10</sup> It too made plans for a convention in Chicago  
in June.

Filled with hope and ideas, this heterogenous group  
of farmers, unionists, intellectuals, small-business men, con-  
verged upon Chicago determined to draw up a platform and nomi-  
nate a candidate. The stage had been set; it was simply a  
matter of unifying the splinter groups and designing a realistic  
campaign.<sup>11</sup>

The Committee of Forty-eight at first met apart from  
the neighboring convention of the Farmer-Laborites. Since they  
were handicapped by the lack of funds and the lack of a means  
of publicity, they were not strong enough to launch a third-  
party movement alone. Shortly after they were assembled, the  
majority of the delegates marched in a body to where the Farmer-  
Labor party was in session, and were welcomed to the fold. The  
joint convention then proceeded bravely, in the face of repu-  
diation by the American Federation of Labor and defection by  
the Non Partisan League, which had reconsidered and decided to  
have none of the movement.<sup>12</sup>

Some at the convention looked to Robert M. LaFollette,  
and his national reputation as a liberal and an organizer, as  
their only hope for political survival. LaFollette was offered  
the nomination, but he refused to abandon the Republican party;

10 Ibid.

11 Minton, 49

12 Ibid., 53

he also believed many proposals of the Farmer-Laborites too 58  
radical. The convention then decided upon Parley P. Christen-  
sen, a lawyer from Salt Lake City, Utah, a former Progressive  
and presiding officer of the convention. Having been counsel  
for the IWW, he was considered by labor to be a genuine radical;  
his running mate was Max S. Hayes, at one time an influential  
13  
member of the Socialist party.

The Farmer-Labor platform stressed the continuing need  
for the protection of civil liberties; it asked for the immediate  
recognition of Soviet Russia and the Irish Free State; it  
condemned American imperialism in Mexico; it urged that the  
Supreme Court be stripped of its power to call acts of Congress  
unconstitutional; and it advocated public ownership of the  
railroads and proposed legislation to curb the "evils of  
14  
democracy.

The Farmer-Labor party had no chance of victory. As  
a minority party, it received little publicity from the news-  
papers and was hard pressed to raise the funds with which to  
hold meetings, and get out the vote. The candidates made an  
active campaign, and one of Christensen's first acts was to  
demand of his Democratic and Republican rivals their support in  
an effort to have the Socialist candidate, Eugene V. Debs,  
15  
released from prison. The party made a conscious effort to  
reconcile the divergent interests of urban and rural labor, and  
to revive the hopes, cherished by so many of its predecessors,

13 Holcombe, 336

14 Schriftgiesser, 65

15 "A Great Joiner," Current Opinion, September, 1920, 322

that the new party might become a major party and thus  
rejuvenate national politics.<sup>16</sup>

In the face of tremendous odds, the party nevertheless polled about a quarter of a million votes in the twenty states in which the party appeared on the official ballot. Perhaps all it accomplished was to draw away from Wilson and the Democrats the more idealistic voters.<sup>17</sup> To quote one critic: the third party movement "created hardly a stir in the deep waters of political complacency in 1920."<sup>18</sup>

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16 Holcombe, 333

17 Dodd, 420

18 Schriftgiesser, 66

## CHAPTER IV.

### PLATFORMS COMPARED.

Political platforms of recent years were of necessity vague creations, designed to include those points on which most men agree. Politicians presented their opinions in such a manner that they might sell themselves to the greatest number of people. In the case of a doubtful or controversial issue, the first impulse of the practical politician was to straddle it, so that harmony may be preserved, the party held together, votes attracted and victory at the polls achieved. In 1920 both the major parties were accused of a "straddle."

At the Republican convention in Chicago, it took these entrusted with the task of presenting the philosophy of their party to the people, from Tuesday, June 8, until late Thursday night to hammer out the platform. Senator Jim Watson of Indiana was chosen to supervise the document, assisted by Senators Lodge, McCormick, Borah, Brandegee, and the reporter-delegate from Kansas, William Allen White. Their assignment was the more difficult because they were all aware that two elements within the party, with almost opposing principles, had to be reconciled: there were divisions in foreign and domestic issues, progressive and conservative opinion for and against the League.

1 Wilbur C. Abbott, "The Great Game of Politics," Yale Review, October, 1920, 46

2 Ibid.

After blaming the Democrats for being unprepared both for war and peace, decrying the abolition of civil liberties under Attorney-General Palmer, the platform presented its domestic policy. The Republicans favored cutting the public debt, lowering the taxes of the wealthy and the excess profits tax; they advocated the return of the railroads to private operators. The popular issue of prohibition was avoided, but farmers were described as the backbone of the nation, and labor was welcomed into cooperation in a common task with capital.

3

Coming to foreign affairs the platform makers were on difficult ground. Some favored out and out isolationism; others desired some form of international cooperation; and some favored the League of Nations as it stood. After much adept maneuvering, the League plank was drawn up;

The Republican Party stands for agreement among nations to preserve the peace of the world. We believe that such international association must be based on international justice, and must provide methods which shall maintain the rule of public right by the development of law and the decision of international courts, and which shall secure instant and general international conference whenever peace shall be threatened by political action, so that the nations pledged to do and insist upon what is just and fair may exercise their influence and power for the prevention of war. We believe that all this can be done without the compromise of national independence, without depriving the people of the United States in advance of the right to determine for themselves what is just and fair, when the occasion arises and without involving them as



participants and not as peacemakers in a multitude of quarrels, the merits of which they are unable to judge. The covenant signed by the President at Paris failed signally to accomplish this great purpose, and contains stipulations, not only intolerable for an independent people, but certain to produce the injustice, hostility, and controversy among nations which it proposed to prevent. That covenant repudiated, to a degree wholly unnecessary and unjustifiably, the time-honored policies in favor of peace declared by Washington, Jefferson, and Monroe. . . .

. . . The unfortunate insistence of the President upon having his own way, without any change and without any regard to the opinions of a majority of the Senate, which shares with him in the treaty-making power, and the President's demand that the Treaty should be ratified without any modification, created a situation in which Senators were required to vote upon their consciences. . . . against the Treaty as it was presented.

. . . we pledge the coming Republican administration to such agreements with other nations of the world as shall meet the full duty of America to civilization and humanity, . . . without surrendering the right of the American people to exercise its judgment and its power in favor of justice and peace. 4

To the Republican supporters of the League of Nations the plank was a great disappointment. One Commentator remarked that the first two paragraphs seemed to promise international cooperation, but the next four seemed to take it away, like the small print of a contract. All the voters had to do was to pick their favorite paragraph. <sup>5</sup> William Howard Taft was of the opinion that the plank was for the adoption of the League with the Lodge reservations, but that it was designed to pre-

4 Republican Campaign Text-Book, 1920, issued by the Republican National Committee, 70 - 72

5 Bailey, 302

vent the bolt of Johnson and Borah from the party.<sup>6</sup>

William Allen White characterized the League plank as a "Pandora's box of seemingly contradictory propositions," and nothing better could have been achieved by Machiavelli or Richelieu at their best.<sup>7</sup>

Newspaper comment again was colored by party preference. The Chicago Tribune stated:

The Republican platform is a compromise of conflicting ideas, as the Democratic will be, and on the whole it offers a sufficiently explicit guidance for voters. What it will come to in terms of actual accomplishment must depend very largely on the man who is nominated and elected chief executive.<sup>8</sup>

The Los Angeles Times wrote, of July 11:

The platform adopted is one that every loyal American regardless of political affiliation can support . . . Only on a single plank is there any evidence of attempted evasion? The League of Nations plank is clearly a compromise with the elements that favor a policy of isolation, for this country in respect to international relations. But even in that plank the spirit of the League is manifest, although the letter is obscure.<sup>9</sup>

The New York Times declared in an editorial:

Only one thing really mattered in the Republican platform this year. It was the plank dealing with the League of Nations. The other planks might be excellent, mediocre, non-committal, or positively bad, and the country would not greatly care. . . . The final compromise patched up is said to "please

6 William Howard Taft, "Mr. Wilson and the Campaign," Yale Review, October, 1920, 12

7 "The Nomination of Harding and Coolidge," Current Opinion, July, 1920, 8

8 Editorial: "The Platform," Chicago Tribune, June 11, 1920

9 Los Angeles Times, June 11, 1920

everybody." That means inevitably  
that it can please nobody who believes  
in honest thought and plain action. 10

64

It further declared the League plank to be "the most indefinite, confusing, contradictory, and cross-eyed series of proposals ever put forward." The plank indicated that the Senators had been insincere; in Washington they professed to be trying to get the Treaty ratified, but at Chicago no reservations were tolerated. 11

The Outlook remarked:

Though not free from buncombe, the diction of this platform is an improvement upon the usual platform phraseology. It is longer than need be; it is to be remembered, however, that a platform is prepared to be used in all sorts of ways by party workers, and not only as a whole but in bits. Judged as it ought to be by other political platforms and not by the ideal of the individual reader, this announcement of Republican doctrine is an advance upon the party declarations to which the country has been accustomed. 12

Democratic politicians were pleased with the Republican platform's straddling of the "great issue;" and they felt that their task would be relatively easy. Nevertheless, the San Francisco platform writers had three complex problems with which to grapple: Prohibition, Ireland and the League. 13  
Senator Carter Glass was named head of the committee which was to draft the platform; the committee began deliberations at seven-thirty in the evening of the opening day, and finished the platform in time to be read at the opening session the next morning. The

10 Editorial: "The Platform," New York Times, June 11, 1920

11 Current Opinion, July, 1920, 8

12 "The Republican Convention: Its Candidates and Platform," Outlook, June 23, 1920, 372

13 Bailey, 316

of Nations. After praising Wilson for his courage and good faith, the platform stated:

The Democratic party favors the League as the surest, if not the only, practicable means of maintaining the permanent peace of the world and terminating the insufferable burden of great military and naval establishments. It was for this that America broke away from her traditional isolation and spent her blood and treasure to crush a colossal scheme of conquest. . . . We advocate the immediate ratification of the Treaty without reservations which would impair its essential integrity, but we do not oppose the acceptance of any reservation making clearer or more specific any of the obligations of the United States to the League associates. 14

The Democrats defended the President's Mexican policy, sympathized with Irish aspirations for self-government, and promised independence to the Philippines. 15 With the Republican platform before them, the Democrats devoted too much space in their own to attacks upon the rival party. As the Administration party it would have been wiser to concentrate upon its own record, rather than to call attention to what the opposition party failed to do. 16

The New York Times was unstinting in its praise of the Democratic platform; it stated:

The Republicans were so hampered by the tortuous course which they had pursued respecting the Treaty, and were so afraid of splitting their party, that they could not speak in a clear voice. They shuffled and hedged and qualified and dodged and

14 Democratic Text Book, 1920

15 Hacker, 4

16 Herbert Adams Gibbons, "The Presidential Campaign," Century Magazine, October, 1920, 837

skulked. In contrast, the Democrats are positive and explicit. They feel in honor committed to stand by the Allies who stood by us. They rightly declare a separate peace for the United States to be abhorrent and unthinkable. . . . The whole has an aggressive and fighting tone, and will make it possible for the Democrats to maintain a vigorous attack throughout the campaign upon the two-faced insincerities of the Republican platform. . . . In fact, the whole platform may be said to be one intended to strengthen and reassure every legitimate commercial and financial enterprise in the country. . . . In domestic matters the platform is keyed to the preservation of the established American way of meeting the recurring problems of industry and of life. . . . All told, the work of the platform builders at San Francisco is better and braver than those who took counsel of their fears had believed possible. From it the solid business interests of the country may well take fresh courage.<sup>17</sup>

The Boston Evening Transcript took the opposite point of view:

A document of negations and evasions on most subjects. . . the platform finally adopted at San Francisco yesterday really assumes to be explicit on one subject, which is the League of Nations. . . weighed in the balance, it must be found, on the strength even of its own claims, professions and promises, lamentably wanting. 18

The New York Tribune remarked that:

The San Francisco platform is a colorless and inexplicit instrument. On important matters which divide public opinion it is silent or it dodges. . . . Political platforms are commonly designed to cajole and deceive, while avoiding anything

<sup>17</sup> Editorial: "Strong and Sound Platform," New York Times, July 3, 1920

<sup>18</sup> Editorial: "The Democratic Platform," Boston Evening Transcript, July 3, 1920

likely to cause party disharmony. So the vague and evasive San Francisco declaration is no novelty. But seldom has there been indefiniteness so open, and a new high water mark of wordiness is set. . . . Many complain of the speak-easy quality of the Chicago platform. Compared with its brother of San Francisco, the Chicago product is a model of decisiveness. 19

The Tribune observed that since the Democratic party does not oppose reservations to the League covenant, it was no different from the Republican position. For that reason the treaty should not be a political issue nor part of the election campaign. 20

As another author put it, "reservation" or "nullification" depended somewhat on who was doing the reserving or nullifying. An article in the Century pointed out that the Democrats preserved the fiction that the Treaty and the League were inseparable; and that any reservation to the League would automatically kill the treaty. It further declared that of the statesmen who drew up the treaty, [Lloyd George, Clemenceau, Grey] Wilson was the only one to hold that view. 22

Most people were quick to note that the platforms of the two major parties were similar in many, many respects; the chief difference was over the League issue, but even there the Republicans and Democrats had something in common. 23 The Prohibition controversy was avoided by both parties in order to avoid

a split into factions: the agricultural South and West, versus  
19 Editorial: "The Frisco Platform," New York Tribune, July 4, 1920

20 Editorial: "The End of a Long Trail," New York Tribune, July 3, 1920

21 Bailey, 316

22 Gibbons, 839

23 Outlook, July 14, 1920, 491

the industrial East.<sup>24</sup> However, the silence on the liquor 68  
question might be regarded as a moral victory for the drys,  
since Prohibition was the law of the land.<sup>25</sup> A few other minor  
differences were the Irish plank, which the Democrats adopted  
and the Republican did not; and the revision of immigration  
laws, with the Republicans coming out squarely for restriction,  
while the Democrats, with their large foreign element, remained  
silent.<sup>26</sup>

The similarities are numerous. The high cost of living, according to the Republican platform, was fifty per cent depreciation of the purchasing value of the dollar and the unsound policies of the Democratic party. The opposing platform placed the blame upon the war and the Republicans. The Republicans vigorously attacked the way in which Mexico was handled by the Administration and pledged itself to a policy which would enforce respect for the American flag. The Democrats declared that their party was unwilling to take advantage of Mexico, but promised recognition when a new, stable government could be established. The Republicans condemned Wilson for asking Congress to empower him to accept a mandate for Armenia, but they expressed sympathy for the people of that country. The Democratic platform expressed the belief that this country should help Armenia to establish its own government. Women voters, using their new privilege for the first time in a presidential election, were welcomed by both parties in short paragraphs.

<sup>24</sup> Kent, 441

<sup>25</sup> Gibbons, 834

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Both parties offered inducements to the farmer, the Democrats 69 going at some length into the subject of farm legislation and costs. The Republicans declared their opposition to government ownership of railroads and endorsed the Esch-Cummins Act. The Democrats asked only that the act be given a fair chance. The Republican party pointed out that Congress had appropriated generously for the disabled of the war and declared that it showed the party purpose of caring for the wounded and maimed; the Democratic platform echoed these sentiments. The Republican platform recognized the justice of collective bargaining and suggested that the government take steps to reduce the frequency of strikes; however they offered no definite plan. The Democrats, likewise, viewed Collective bargaining with a friendly eye and deplored strikes, but they too, failed to outline a remedy. The Republicans urged a reform in the tax laws, but no reduction in total revenue. The Democrats also asked tax reform, condemning the Republican Congress for failure to do so. Both parties declared themselves in favor of the exclusion of Asiatics; congratulated themselves on the establishment of a merchant marine.<sup>27</sup> There was a little bit in both platforms on the tariff, no trust planks; and both ignored Russia and were silent on the Soldier's bonus. Summing up, as the Current Opinion remarked, with the exception of the League plank, the two platforms might have been written by the same hand.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> New York Evening Post, July 6, 1920

<sup>28</sup> "The League of Nations as the Dominant Issue," Current Opinion, August, 1920, 151



party platforms did nothing to make the voter's choice easy, it remained for the campaign to bring out the more pronounced differences between the parties, by means of the speeches of the principals.

CHAPTER V  
CAMPAIGNING

In 1920, the political campaigns started with the official notification of nomination, and the acceptance speech by the candidate. The nominating convention customarily appointed a committee to bring the glad tidings in person; this usually occurred some six weeks after the convention adjourned. The Republican notification ceremony took place in a park in Marion, Ohio, Harding's home town, on July 22; that same small town was to be the site of the major portion of Republican activity, since Harding and his party advisers had determined on a "front-porch" campaign of the McKinley type. Members of the Republican National Committee from all the states were seated on the platform when Senator Henry Cabot Lodge delivered the official notification. In closing his acceptance speech, Harding said:

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, my countrymen all: I would not be my natural self if I did not utter my consciousness of my limited ability to meet your full expectations or to realize the aspirations within my own breast, but I will gladly give all that is in me, all of heart, soul and mind and abiding love of country, to service in our common cause. I can only pray to the Omnipotent God that I may be as worthy in service as I know myself to be faithful in thought and purpose. One cannot give more. Mindful of the vast responsibilities I must be frankly humble, but I have that confidence in the consideration

and support of all true Americans which makes me unafraid. With an unalterable faith and in a hopeful spirit, with a hymn of service in my heart, I pledge fidelity to our country and to God, and accept the nomination of the Republican party for the Presidency of the United States. 1

The moment it was decided that Harding was to stick close to home, the Republican candidate commanded numerous advantages. In the first place, he would never have to present unprepared speeches to handfuls of people, from the rear platform of a train. The night before a scheduled speech from the front porch, the text would be released to the press to be put on the telegraph wires. A second advantage in this type of campaign is that the candidate preserves his physical well-being and his dignity, and he is less vulnerable to the slips and breaks which come from being over-tired. Furthermore, the speeches can be planned with deliberation and thought, and tiresome repetitions can be avoided. On the other hand, the front-porch campaign obviously eliminates giving millions of people the opportunity to see and hear the candidate in person.<sup>2</sup>

The strategists of the Republican campaign sent George Harvey to Marion to write the speeches. Next they set up publicity headquarters in Chicago, which were operated by Albert Lasker, an advertising and publicity genius, and George Sutherland, whose term in the Senate had expired in 1917.<sup>3</sup> The front-porch campaign proved successful largely because of Harding's

1 Adams, 174

2 Sait, 497

3 Schriftgiesser, 68

manner and bearing. He was an extremely handsome, imposing figure, with a warm, genuine smile. The typical first-citizen of a small town, Harding possessed the physical stamina to survive two hours of continual hand-shaking.<sup>4</sup> Marion became the Mecca of political favor-seekers, reporters, famous entertainers anxious to show regard for the candidate. For Newsreel photographers, Harding posed pitching horsehoes and scoring ringers, but actually the ringers were dropped over the stake by an assistant out of the range of the camera.<sup>5</sup> When the Chicago Cubs came to town, Harding donned a catcher's mitt and dexterously caught several pitches from the team's great Grover Cleveland Alexander. At the same time he appropriately remarked that "our one-man team had muffed domestic affairs badly and had then struck out at Paris."<sup>6</sup>

The ceremonies to notify Calvin Coolidge of his nomination took place on a part of the Smith College grounds, at Northampton, Massachusetts.<sup>7</sup> At first the party leaders planned to give Coolidge the task of making the "swing around the circle," the extensive, strenuous, traveling campaign; they sent him to the Northwest for a trial. It was soon found that he lacked popular appeal because of his dry voice and chill New England manner; the try-out was a dismal failure. Then Coolidge was hastily transferred to the southern states of Kentucky, Tennessee, North and South Carolina, since it was certain that he could do little harm in the solid South, and possibly he might do some

<sup>4</sup> Adams, 170

<sup>5</sup> Minton, 55

<sup>6</sup> Bailey, 326

<sup>7</sup> Coolidge, 151

good. On the whole, however, Coolidge was kept in the background; it mattered little since, not being the head of the ticket, he neither issued nor declared policies. Coolidge posed for many newspaper pictures at his father's home in Plymouth, Massachusetts; and because he had little to say, the newspapermen enjoyed writing about the taciturn "Silent Cal."

With the two chief candidates ineligible for active campaigning, it remained for Republican professional spell-binders to take the stump. Men like Governor Lowden of Illinois, Herbert Hoover, and Senator Hiram Johnson took over the task. Will Hays had seen to it that the campaign was well organized and directed. The method employed by the party to raise funds was entirely different from any method ever before tried. The Republicans initiated a system of personal solicitation which resembled that used by the Red Cross and the Liberty Loan organization in their financial drives during the World War. In an effort to refute Democratic charges that they were buying the government, the Republicans would not permit any one person to contribute more than \$1000. This resulted in the party being unable to secure sufficient funds to carry on its work; and consequently the party closed the campaign with a large deficit.

The Republican expenditures for the 1920 campaign were the great-

8 Adams, 170

9 Coolidge, 152

10 Schriftgiesser, 70

11 James K. Pollock, Party Campaign Funds, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1926, 71

12 Ibid., 129

est then recorded; however, most of the money had been spent in preliminary work, so that after the National Convention in June,<sup>13</sup> many further expenses could be avoided.

Probably the most serious complaints raised against the contributions to party funds relate to their size. When one person donates \$50,000 or \$100,000 to the fund of a particular party, the inference is immediately drawn by many persons that the donor is seeking influence in the party. In past campaigns there have been many large contributions to the funds of both parties.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, it was true that at least six men on the Democratic contributors list of 1912 and 1916 were later appointed foreign ambassadors; and undoubtedly large contributors in the Republican party were granted important posts. Certainly the objection seemed valid, so party leaders, noting the trend of public sentiment,<sup>15</sup> ruled against large donations.

The most difficult problem to be solved by the Republican candidate was his exact position on the League of Nations issue. It was well-known that there were two opposing factions in the Republican party; and Harding was in the middle, apparently believing that it was his job to keep peace between the "irreconcilables," like Senator Johnson, and the pro-Leaguers, like Taft. If harmony could be preserved until after the election, perhaps Harding could then work out something in line with the wishes of the majority.<sup>16</sup> During the campaign Harding wobbled all over the issue; in one breath he denounced the Treaty of Ver-

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 28

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 127

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 128

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, 328

sailles and all its conditions then he would speak of amending the League so that it would be acceptable to the United States, particularly to the Senate; still later he mentioned some vague association of nations which the country would be willing to

17

join. As a matter of fact, in most of his speeches, Harding condemned the "Wilson" League; but conceded the possibility of an amended League. In a speech from his front porch on August 28, he outlined his ideas on an association of nations; but one

month later admitted that he was without any specific program relative to such a scheme. <sup>18</sup> Late in September, leaving his front

porch in order to counteract the effects of Cox's whirlwind campaign, Harding undertook a series of one-night stands. At Des

Moines, Iowa, on October 7, Harding made the tactical blunder of coming out positively against the League, saying:

I do not want to clarify these obligations; I want to turn my back on them. It is not interpretation but rejection I am seeking. . . .

I understand the position of the Democratic candidate and he understands mine. . . . In simple words, it is that he favors going into the Paris League and I favor staying out. <sup>19</sup>

Immediately, "irreconcilable" Johnson took the stump for Harding

in the West, and "irreconcilable" Borah declared that Harding spoke for the entire country because he was against any international League or association of any kind. <sup>20</sup>

A group of thirty-one eminent people, mostly Repub-

17 Louis M. Hacker, American Problems of Today, F. S. Crofts and Company, New York, 1938, 5

18 Bailey, 326

19 Ibid., 327

20 Schriftgiesser, 75

77  
licans, who hoped to see America direct the restoration of Europe, banded together under the leadership of Elihu Root. This Committee of Thirty-One included Charles Evans Hughes, Herbert Hoover, William Allen White, George W.ickersham, Nicholas Murray Butler, and William Howard Taft. On October 14, just one week after Harding's Des Moines speech, a statement drawn up by Root and signed by the committee and later by twenty-five other names, was released to the press and the public. It declared, in effect, that:

The Republican party had long stood for international cooperation; the Republican Senate had tried to get us into the League with the Lodge reservations, but had been blocked by Wilson. Cox, even if he won, could not get the treaty through. The Republican platform did not preclude a League, and while Harding had admittedly been blowing both hot and cold, he had twice voted for the League, and he had conceded the possibilities of an amended League. Regardless of what he was now saying, when he came into high office the force of circumstances would compel him to accept a reserved League. He would then see that the League was operating hopefully, and that the other nations would not accept his vague association. 21

One commentator pointed out that such a statement was unique in American history, since "it virtually proclaimed, under the most respectable auspices, that Harding was a liar, or he did not know what he was saying, or he could be controlled by the elder statesmen after election."<sup>22</sup> There was no doubt but that Root

document brought back into line many wavering Republican voters.

21 Bailey, 330

22 Ibid., 329



In reply to this declaration, Harding and his speech writers emphasized, in the closing weeks of the campaign,<sup>23</sup> that when elected, he would call to Washington the "best minds" in the nation, men and women, Republicans and Democrats, and with them work out some kind of an association of nations or even a reconstructed League.

Thus came about the amazing and confused situation in which Harding was trying to be all things to all people. One newspaper remarked that there are two sides to every question, but even if there were three, the candidate for President would be on all of them at once.<sup>24</sup> That Harding could placate both Johnson and Taft at the same time was a major political achievement. Johnson would interpret Harding's words to mean an end to the League; Taft was convinced Harding favored a League with reservations. Taft would himself have accepted the League without change, but he supported Harding's candidacy because he believed that circumstances would compel him to return to his senatorial position of a Lodge reservationist.<sup>25</sup> In his autobiography Cox stated that undoubtedly Taft, a former Republican President, felt that he could not betray his party, but acted in good faith. Cox then remarked that Wilson should have taken Taft to Paris as one of the peace commissioners, since he would have added prestige and devotion to the League.<sup>26</sup> In such a way, therefore did it come about that Harding won the support of

23 Adams, 177

24 Bailey, 328

25 Schriftgiesser, 75

26 Cox, 278

both pro-Leaguers and anti-Leaguers. Many of them later regretted that support.<sup>27</sup>

The general tone of the campaign, between the principals, was polite, well-bred, and decorous; especially since in the private lives of the two men were facts which could easily lead to mud-slinging. The Democratic leaders knew about Harding's liaison with Nan Britton, and of his illegitimate daughter, but they did not use their information in the campaign. By the same token, the Republicans did not emphasize the fact of Cox's divorce, an event which could have been expected to alienate the Democratic Catholic vote.<sup>28</sup>

The one sensation of the campaign, the story that there was negro blood in the Harding family, exploded during the last few days of the campaign. At first the story was passed along in whispers; but then millions of anonymous circulars flooded the country, attempting to prove the rumor by a genealogical tree. Under orders from the indignant President Wilson, the post offices refused to receive or handle the circulars; thereupon messengers were hired to distribute them by hand at night.<sup>29</sup>

The circular, with its attached affidavits and tables, stated that there was not just one strain of negro blood in the Harding family, but four.<sup>30</sup> One of the affidavits bore the signature of W. E. Chancellor; and at that time there was a

William E. Chancellor on the faculty at Wooster College, not far from Marion.<sup>31</sup> Chancellor was an author whose books had been

<sup>27</sup> Myers, 405

<sup>28</sup> Stone, 31

<sup>29</sup> Daugherty, 60

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Sullivan, 133

published by Macmillan, Putnam's, and Houghton Mifflin, and he called himself an anthropologist, ethnologist and genealogist. Convinced of the truth in the local gossip about Harding, Chancellor investigated the matter and published his conclusions in pamphlets entitled Harding's Family Tree and To the Men and women of  
 32  
America. It must have required between fifteen to twenty thou-

sand dollars to print and distribute the circulars, so the question naturally arose as to the source of the money. Professor Chancellor could not have paid the bills from his salary; Cox, the rival candidate, was not the kind of man to resort to smear tactics; other Democrats denied any connection with the enterprise. The identity of the financial "angel" has never been  
 33  
 discovered, so the mystery still remains. Professor Chancellor

was summoned before the board of trustees of Wooster College to be questioned. He admitted having made a study of Harding's ancestry, but denied writing the circular. By unanimous vote, the board requested his resignation and Chancellor submitted it without protest. After the election of Harding, but before his inauguration, Chancellor went to Canada and remained there during  
 34  
 the administration.

The politicians wondered what to do about the story. It had reared its head in every election in which Harding was a  
 35  
 candidate, from 1898 to 1920. Newspaper reporters at Marion tried to trace the story to its source.

32 Adams, 180

33 Ibid., 181

34 Sullivan, 133

35 Daugherty, 60

It went back some seventy years to a schoolyard quarrel of children, one side of which, after exhausting the effectiveness of tongue stuck out and thumb to the nose, and after using up the more familiar epithets of "scum" and "trash," had the happy inventiveness to think of "nigger." As it happened, this particular quarrel did not have the fortunate evanescence of most school-yard flare-ups. An incident of physical violence attended it and this led to a neighborhood feud that included grown-ups. "Nigger" became an epithet which one side hurled at the other; for generations the epithet remained alive. . . . 36

Immediately that Chancellor's genealogical table appeared, Chairman Will Hays issued an authentic family tree which had been drawn up by the historical society of Wyoming, Pennsylvania, where the early Hardings had stopped on their way to Ohio. 37

The Republican campaign managers decided to leave the decision up to Harding whether to ignore the story, or issue a formal denial. Throughout his political career Harding had never stooped to deny the rumor; but it was believed that in 1920 he was willing to give the story official notice by means of a wholesale denial until Mrs. Harding vetoed the entire plan. 38 The only public reference to the slander was made by Harry Daugherty, when he introduced Harding at the last speaking engagement in Columbus; he closed with the words: "No lip of libel nor tongue of slander can harm your cause, or you." 39

Although the politicians were puzzled as to their course of action regarding the story, the newspapers were in a

36 Sullivan, 136

37 Ibid., 132

38 Adams, 184

greater quandary. Since it was a dangerous story as well as a "big story," most papers suppressed it. In the history of American newspapers, it would be hard to find another instance where so much was left unprinted on a topic of public interest. <sup>40</sup> The New York Evening Post published an editorial on November 1, which

advised the voters to vote on issues instead of scandal:

This rule holds true for the story about Senator Harding's ancestry. No intelligent voter should allow his judgment to be influenced by an argument that would not be germane if it were true; and this particular argument has been projected into publicity at a time when there is no opportunity for passing on its truth of falsity. The only way to handle the business of Harding's ancestry is to pick it up with the tongs and throw it into the ash barrel. There are enough real reasons why Senator Harding should be defeated tomorrow. 41

Most observers were agreed that the negro allegation produced no adverse effects politically; on the contrary, it boomeranged in Harding's favor.

Meanwhile James Middleton Cox and his Democratic advisers were plotting their campaign strategy. The first meeting between the two principals occurred when Franklin D. Roosevelt stopped off at Columbus on his way home from the San Francisco convention. Cox felt that they should not emphasize the League question too much, but should concentrate on a strong appeal to labor and on the prohibition question. Roosevelt backed the League of Nations wholeheartedly. Just who suggested the

<sup>40</sup> Adams, 184

<sup>41</sup> Editorial: "Vote on Issues, Not on Scandal," New York Evening Post, November 1, 1920

visit to Wilson was difficult to determine. In his autobiography Cox took credit for originating the plan, which Roosevelt<sup>42</sup> enthusiastically supported; Roosevelt's biographer declared that he suggested to Cox the advantages of a visit to Wilson, and that

Cox concurred. Several of the party leaders, among whom was Edmond Moore, Cox's campaign manager, were convinced that it would be politically unwise for Cox to align himself with Wilson too closely, since the defeat of McAdoo and Palmer at the convention had been interpreted as a victory over Wilson.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps

the meeting was arranged so that Cox could meet Wilson for the first time, although Cox maintained that whenever he was in Washington on state business, he always stopped at the White House. Perhaps the visit was to show the electorate that the party was united.<sup>44</sup>

At any rate, Cox and Roosevelt made a journey to Washington and conferred with the President on July 18, 1920; it was their first official act as candidates. Roosevelt's account of the visit was as follows:

I accompanied the Governor on the visit to Wilson. A large crowd greeted us at the station and we went directly to the White House. There we were asked to wait fifteen minutes, as they were taking the President to the portico facing the grounds. As we came in sight of the portico we saw the President in a wheel chair, his left shoulder covered with a shawl which concealed his left arm, which was paralyzed, and the Governor said to me, "He is a very sick man."

42 Hatch, 120

43 Cox, 243

44 F.D.R. Letters, 496

The Governor went up to the President and warmly greeted him. Wilson looked up and in a very low, weak voice said, "Thank you for coming. I am very glad you came." His utter weakness was startling and I noticed tears in the eyes of Cox. A little later Cox said, "Mr. President, we are going to be a million per cent with you and your administration, and that means the League of Nations." The President looked up again, and again in a voice scarcely audible, he said, "I am very grateful," and then repeated, "I am very grateful." 45

At the conclusion of the interview, Cox and Roosevelt paused with Joseph Tumulty, Wilson's secretary, to write a longhand statement regarding the conference. Cox's read: From every viewpoint the meeting was delightful. The President was at his best, recalling any detail inquired about as bearing upon the international situation and enlivening the whole conference with a humorous anecdote now and then in his characteristic way. We are agreed as to the meaning and sufficiency of the Democratic platform and the duty of the party in the face of threatened bad faith to the world in the name of America. His thought is still of the war and the pledges we gave to those who sacrificed. One easily sees that as the leader of the nation who asked for our sons and our resources upon a very distinct understanding and obligation he is resolved that faith shall be kept. To this his thought and life are dedicated. What he promised I shall use my strength to give. 46

Roosevelt wrote:

I wish that every American could have been a silent witness to the meeting of these two great men. Their splendid accord and their high purpose are an

45 Cox, 241

46 Ibid., 242

inspiration. I need only add that my regret in leaving my post under President Wilson is softened by the knowledge that my new "Commander-in-chief" will be his wholly worthy successor. 47

Until the time of the interview Cox had not decided whether he would make the League of Nations a key issue of his campaign; however, after July 18, Cox became an ardent supporter of the League. <sup>48</sup> Perhaps the decision was influenced by his compassion <sup>49</sup> for the ailing President.

The next hurdle for the Democratic party was the selection of a National Chairman, since the incumbent, Homer S. Cummings did not desire re-election. Cox and Roosevelt were present at the meeting of the National Committee at Columbus, July 20. The prevailing opinion was that the new chairman should be from Ohio, since the election would be hotly contested in the Buckeye State. The most likely man for the job, Edmond Moore who had managed Cox's pre-convention campaign, refused the position himself. Moore then strongly opposed the selection of Cox's second choice, Cordell Hull, Congressman from Tennessee, the reason being some misunderstanding that had developed between <sup>50</sup> the two men during the convention. After seven hours of deliberation it was arranged that Moore would resign as the Ohio member of the National Committee and be replaced by Congressman George White, who was immediately elevated to the chairmanship of the Committee. These tactics were made necessary by the rules

47 Ibid., 243

48 Kent, 454

49 F.D.R. Letters, 498

50 Cox, 238



which stated that the Committee could be headed only by one of  
 51  
 its members.

Democratic campaigning began with the official notification ceremonies at Cox's home town of Dayton, on August 7. The acceptance speech of the candidate was expected to indicate plainly his interpretation of the party platform. Cox stated unequivocally that as the Democratic candidate he favored joining the League of Nations which was already in operation. Regarding reservations, Cox declared that "Our platform clearly lays no bar against any additions that will be helpful, but it speaks in a firm resolution against anything that disturbs the vital principle."  
 52

The notification did not take place at Cox's home, a beautiful mansion called "Trailsend;" The usual custom was abandoned because the party leaders feared that if pictures of the estate were to appear in the newspapers, votes might be lost.

53

Obviously Cox could not affect the small town atmosphere.

The vice-presidential candidate received his official notification at Hyde Park, New York, on August 9. To the assembled crowd, Roosevelt said:

In our world problems we must either shut our eyes, sell our newly built merchant marine to more farseeing foreign powers, crush utterly by embargo and harassing legislation our foreign trade, close our ports, and build an impregnable wall of costly armaments and live, as the Orient used to live, a hermit nation, dreaming of the past; or we must open our eyes and see that modern civilization

51 F.D.R. Letters, 498

52 Schriftgiesser, 72

53 Dodd, 428

has become so complex and the lives of civilized men so interwoven with the lives of other men in other countries as to make it impossible to be in this world and not of it. We must see that it is impossible to avoid, except by monastic seclusion, those honorable and intimate foreign relations which the fearful-hearted shudderingly mis-call by the devil's catchword, "international complications." 54

Cox took the stump in a most ambitious tour which took him some 22,000 miles and brought him before approximately 2,000,000 people. "He gestured vigorously, stamped his foot emphatically, and called spades spades, crooks crooks, and liars liars." 55 In the early part of his campaign, Cox charged that the Republicans were raising a huge slush fund with which to "buy" the Presidency; he laid his evidence of a \$30,000,000 fund before the Kenyon Committee which began an investigation of the matter; and he branded the two principal Republican money-raisers, "the Gold Dust twins." 56 Cox also served notice that his was to be a dry, and not a wet, campaign, regardless of the fancies of the big city bosses. 57 He assailed the Republicans for accusing him of being a "wet"; and he truthfully pointed out the fact that Harding owned stock in a brewery. 58

One of Cox's trips during the campaign was the longest on record. Lasting twenty-nine days, and covering 9975 miles, the campaign swing touched all the states west of the Mississippi with the exception of Arkansas, Louisiana, and

54 Schriftgiesser, 75

55 Bailey, 322

56 Pollock, 19

57 Dodd, 429

58 Bailey, 322

Texas. The candidate remarked that it was easy to discover the politics of the man who was running the nearby switch engine during speeches from the platform of the special train. The engineer would be quiet with his locomotive or not, depending on his partisanship.<sup>60</sup> Then Cox casually observed that he did not have as many disagreeable experiences along those lines as did the Republican candidate.

Only in the last few weeks of his campaign did Cox make the League the paramount issue. He attempted to discuss the League from various angles, going so far as to explain the controversial Article X to Irish and German audiences. If Cox was in doubt as to how to proceed, he would simply look in the newspapers for some contradiction in a new statement by Harding.<sup>61</sup> In one of his last speeches before election day, in Madison Square Garden, Cox made a marked departure from the Wilson line regarding the League covenant, when he announced that the United States should assume no obligation to defend other members of the League "unless approved and authorized by Congress in each case."<sup>62</sup> That statement made Cox's position on the League essentially that of Senator Lodge; and it moved Charles Evans Hughes to remark that before the week was out the Democratic candidate would be running on the Republican platform.<sup>63</sup>

Cox had his shortcomings, but there was only one issue on which he could be criticized in politics. In 1916,

59 Cox, 266

60 Ibid., 267

61 Ibid., 270

62 Schriftgiesser, 78

63 Bailey, 323

running for re-election as Governor of Ohio, he had courted the votes of the German-Americans. Many editorials in his paper, the Dayton News, were distinctly pro-German; even after the Lusitania was sunk the newspaper observed that the "U-boats have committed no crime against us."<sup>64</sup> Cox did not write the editorials; George F. Burba did. But since Cox neither criticized nor changed Burba's editorials, he was ultimately responsible for their tone.<sup>65</sup> Cox tried to offset the effect of those editorials in 1920 by pointing to his very creditable record as war Governor.<sup>66</sup>

Franklin Delano Roosevelt as vice-presidential candidate was only slightly less energetic in his campaign travels than was Cox. He twice toured the country from coast to coast, for a total of 18,000 miles, in his private railroad car, the Westboro, which was attached to regular trains according to a careful schedule.<sup>67</sup> In three months he made nearly one thousand speeches, not including the numerous impromptu addresses from the rear of the car.<sup>68</sup> The magical Roosevelt name -- some people thought he was Teddy's son -- drew large crowds which so alarmed the Republicans that they sent Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. out on his trail to brand Franklin as a "maverick," and to neutralize his success.<sup>69</sup> Among Roosevelt's team on the Westboro was

Stephen Farly who functioned as advance man. Roosevelt gained

<sup>64</sup> Stone, 29  
<sup>65</sup> "The New Democracy and Its Banner-Bearers," Current Opinion, August, 1920, 146  
<sup>66</sup> "Mr. Cox and the German-Americans," Outlook, July, 28, 1920, 560  
<sup>67</sup> F.D.R. Letters, 508  
<sup>68</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>69</sup> Hatch, 123  
<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

fruitful political experience during his campaign, but he made several bad blunders which were pounced on by the opposition. First, he promised that if Cox were elected the treaty would be ratified within sixty days. Then he was quoted as saying, at Butte, Montana, that the United States would actually control about twelve votes in the League Assembly; that he himself had controlled, while Assistant Secretary of the Navy, the republics of Santo Domingo and Haiti, and that he had written the new constitution of the latter himself. <sup>71</sup> While most people conceded the inevitability of defeat, Roosevelt talked eagerly of victory; perhaps he was kidding himself, or perhaps it was just impossible for him to engage in a fight without believing that he would win. <sup>72</sup> Roosevelt made only one suggestion to Cox, that of having the vice-president sit with the Cabinet; when Cox refused he gave as his reasons the fact that he wanted harmonious relations with Congress and therefore could not leave himself open to the charge that the Vice-President was a white House snoop. <sup>73</sup>

President Wilson watched the campaign with much interest. About September 17 he contributed \$500 to the Democratic campaign, touching off a "Match-the-President" drive which was quite successful. <sup>74</sup> His second effort to influence the election occurred on October 27 when he addressed a delegation of fifteen prominent pro-League Republicans. Reading from a manuscript in a thick, low voice, he pleaded that we go through with our moral

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71 Bailey, 323

72 Hatch, 121

73 Cox, 238

74 Bailey, 331

obligation to maintain world peace. Wilson remained fixed in his belief that Cox and Roosevelt would win, even though his Cabinet members reported that the Democrats did not have a chance. On the evening before election Wilson sent Cox his congratulations on his courageous campaign.

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Cox noted that the results of the election would probably be determined by the fact that three racial groups had gone over to the Republican side: the Irish, because Wilson had failed to include Irish independence as part of the Versailles Treaty; the Italians, because Fiume had been taken from Italy; and the Germans, because Wilson had brought the United States into the war. The racial factor would assure a Democratic defeat in Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Nebraska, and others.

78

Cox then struck out at what he termed the "militantly anti-Wilson Catholic oligarchy," whose influence spread to many parishes of the nation. He cited no evidence in support of his charge; but perhaps it simply carried out to a logical conclusion his accusation against the Irish, the Italians, and the Germans.

79

A second episode of a religious nature happened when the anti-Wilson Harvey's Weekly published a cartoon of a famous painting by Raphael, in which it satirized Cox and the League. Fearful lest this unfitting sneer at the Catholic faith should

- 75 Ibid., 332  
 76 Daniels, 561  
 77 Bailey, 332  
 78 Cox, 272  
 79 Ibid., 274

antagonize the Democratic Irishmen who were flocking to the Republican party, the Republican leaders tried to make amends. Thus in its closing days, the election which was to be a "solemn referendum" had degenerated into an appeal to racial and religious antagonisms.

The newspaper polls all prophesied a Democratic defeat. The Literary Digest of October 16, 1920, carried the results of its poll in the pivotal states, which were as follows:

	Harding	Cox	Minor Candidates	Total
New York	19,619	4,149	1,787	25,555
New Jersey	19,558	3,964	1,118	24,640
Ohio	16,525	5,736	964	23,225
Indiana	15,294	7,506	1,059	23,859
Illinois	16,612	3,415	1,466	21,493
California	13,046	3,659	1,404	18,109
Total	100,654	28,429	7,798	136,881

One astute observer had remarked that if the Republicans could campaign for three months without saying anything, they could win the election. From all indications before the election on Tuesday, November 2, 1920, the Republicans had been successful in doing just that.

80 Bailey, 333

81 Literary Digest, October 16, 1920, 9

82 Norman Hapgood, "The San Francisco Answer," Independent, July 10, 1920, 43

## CHAPTER VI

### THE ELECTION AS A "SOLEMN REFERENDUM"

President Woodrow Wilson had written to the Jackson Day banqueters in January, 1920:

If there is any doubt as to what the people of the country think on this vital matter (the League,) the clear and simple way is to submit it for determination at the next election to the voters of the nation, to give the next election the form of a great and solemn referendum -- a referendum as to the part the United States is to play in completing the settlements of the war and the prevention in the future of such outrages as Germany attempted to perpetrate.<sup>1</sup>

With a spiritless campaign behind them, political leaders were worried by the lethargy of the electorate on the evening before election day. The results made Republican doubts seem incredibly foolish. The results were broadcast, for the first time in history, from the Westinghouse radio station at Pittsburgh, KDKA.<sup>2</sup> In the words of Tumulty, Wilson's secretary,<sup>3</sup> "It wasn't a landslide; it was an earthquake." The popular vote read: Warren Harding - 16,152,200; James M. Cox - 9,147,353; Socialist Eugene V. Debs - 919,799; Farmer-Laborite Parley P. Christensen - 265,411; and Prohibitionist Aaron S. Watkins - 189,408.<sup>4</sup> The Republican candidates won 404 electoral

<sup>1</sup> Stoddard, 515

<sup>2</sup> Adams, 185

<sup>3</sup> Schriftgiesser, 79

<sup>4</sup> Myers, 453



votes; the Democrats, the remaining 127. Harding carried 94 thirty-seven states, with only the traditional states of the solid South lining up behind Cox: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas and Virginia. A further surprise was the fact that the Republicans won Tennessee, the first of the old Secession states to vote Republican since the Reconstruction period.<sup>5</sup> Another record broken in 1920 was the remarkable showing of the Socialist candidate who polled his highest total to date; part of the Debs vote was probably a protest against his imprisonment, the other part a protest against the poor selection as represented by Harding and Cox.<sup>6</sup>

The Republican pluralities even in normally Democratic areas were immense. Cox lost New York City by about 440,000 votes; Governor Al Smith, running for reelection on the same ticket carried the city with 320,000 votes, but lost the state by a narrow margin. This situation was caused by a combination of circumstances: a New York Irish bolt from the Democratic ticket,<sup>7</sup> the personal popularity of Smith, and a protest against Wilson. Despite Harding's crushing majority, it was also true that an unusually large percentage of the eligible voters did not bother even to go to the polls.<sup>8</sup>

Warren G. Harding had broken a triple precedent by his victory. No man had ever been elected President from the

5 Bailey, 334

6 Ibid., 335

7 Ibid., 342

8 Ibid., 334

Senate, although Senators had been nominated and defeated, as was Stephen A. Douglas. While Baptists have been nominated, as in the case of Charles Evans Hughes, none have been victorious. And finally no journalist was ever elected, although journalists have been nominated and defeated, as was Horace Greeley.<sup>9</sup> The victory should have come as a surprise to no one however, since the straw votes all had indicated it, and the Wall Street betting odds were ten to one in Harding's favor. The election had only decided how large the Republican plurality would be.<sup>10</sup>

James M. Cox's message of congratulations to Harding stated:

In the spirit of America, I accept the decision of the majority, tender as the defeated candidate my congratulations, and pledge as a citizen my support to the executive authority in whatever emergency might arise. 11

After the defeat, President Wilson sent the following message to Cox:

I hope that you know that no Democrat attributes the defeat of Tuesday to anything that you did or omitted to do. We have all admired the fight that you made with the greatest sincerity, and believe that the whole country honors you for the frank and courageous way in which you conducted the campaign. 12

The newspaper comments subsequent to the election revealed a marked division on party lines. The Los Angeles Times stated: Senator Harding won the confidence of the American people by the frank, clear, and uncompromising manner in

<sup>9</sup> Independent, July 10, 1920, 44

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, 333

<sup>11</sup> Cox, 280

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 281

which he expressed himself on the great issues of the day . . . . He secured the hatred of the fanatics and radicals by his advocacy of stable policies; but the reserve and courage he displayed won for him the confidence of the great masses of the American people.<sup>13</sup>

The New York Evening Post observed that

Warren G. Harding has been elected President by enormous majorities over Woodrow Wilson. The name of the unsuccessful candidate reads otherwise on the ballots cast yesterday. But it is not James M. Cox that was repudiated . . . . For Woodrow Wilson, who gave to this country an ideal, and for James M. Cox, who made a valiant fight in behalf of what was for the moment a forlorn hope, there is assurance that their work has not been in vain. The ideal of a world counsel against war is not dead. The great and solemn referendum has only entered upon another stage.<sup>14</sup>

The New York Times commented that:

It was predestination that the Republicans should win -- they knew that long ago . . . The American electorate is proverbially fond of a "change." Without the League of Nations issue to stir their prophets to warnings of certain war under Article X, the Republicans would have carried this election by a heavy majority. The taxes, the unrest, the multitudinous harrassments that were the progeny of the war would have roused a very general desire to put the Democratic Party out of power.<sup>15</sup>

The Chicago Tribune remarked

It was because Mr. Wilson no longer acted for and in behalf of the American people that they so strongly repudiated him and his policies. <sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Editorial: "Party and Candidate - What the Victory Means," Los Angeles Times, November 4, 1920

<sup>14</sup> Editorial: "A Gigantic Protest," New York Evening Post, November 3, 1920

<sup>15</sup> Editorial: "Victory and Its Responsibilities," New York Times, November 3, 1920

<sup>16</sup> Editorial: "Bygones," Chicago Tribune, November 4, 1920

The New York Tribune declared that:

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The reasons for the overwhelming election of Senator Harding and Governor Coolidge are plain to even the dullest. The country was weary of Wilsonism in all its manifestations. . . . 17

The Boston Evening Transcript observed that:

The result of the "Great and solemn referendum" was never open to reasonable question. But the emphasis with which the American people expressed their "great and solemn" convictions at the polls yesterday, exceeded all expectations. It was truly the voice of the people, and they thundered forth their answer so loud that it will be heard around the world. 18

The Christian Science Monitor sounded a scholarly note in its editorial when it pointed out:

As Professor Charles Edward Merriam of the University of Chicago says in his new book on "American Political Ideas," "This is primarily an age of advertising and brokerage, and the party leaders serve the useful purpose of purveyors of political ideas and agents. These they present and advertise, looking for the acceptance and approval, which spells political success." The election of Senator Warren G. Harding and Governor Calvin Coolidge as President and Vice-President is, of course, the result of just such advertising and indicates just such approval by the voters. In other words, the Republican Advertising and Brokerage have, in this case, been more successful than the Democratic. . . . 19

No sooner had the voter's choice been registered than arguments began as to what had determined the results. Was it the candidates, their party platforms, the League of Nations,

17 Editorial: "The Result," New York Tribune, November 2, 1920  
18 Editorial: "The People's Answer," Boston Evening Transcript, November 3, 1920  
19 Editorial: "Harding and Coolidge," Christian Science Monitor, November 4, 1920

Wilson, or just the desire for a change? The candidates 98  
had one thing in common, their mediocrity. Each was an Ohio  
regular politician, safe, moderate, and lacking the qualities  
and achievement which makes enemies. Both were typical party  
products and were chosen for their availability. If the  
candidates chosen by the two major parties compared unfavorably  
with their immediate predecessors, it should be noted that  
Roosevelt and Wilson might be termed political miracles. Ever  
since the final establishment of the nominating conventions in  
1840, it was not the general rule for the parties to choose  
their foremost men as candidates. Men of ability, originality,  
and leadership often represent some special or sectional  
interest; therefore they are objectionable to other interests  
within the party. For that reason, great leaders were passed  
by in favor of less capable men who were not offensive to any  
particular bloc of delegates. Regarding the array of candidates  
in 1920, it was remarked that they made James Buchanan look  
like a strong and respectable figure.

For a short time the Republicans were actually  
fearful of a Democratic victory; Cox had a commendable  
administrative record as Governor of Ohio; he was popular with  
Labor; he opposed high taxes; and he promised to enforce Pro-  
hibition since it was the law of the land. To counteract

these advantages were the facts that Cox had been nominated

21 Holcombe, 304

22 Ibid., 303

23 Ibid.

24 Oswald Garrison Villard, "The Ghosts at San Francisco,"  
Nation, June 26, 1920, 846

25 Outlook, July 21, 1920, 528

with the help of Tammany, that he had curried favor with 99  
The German Americans, and that the Democrats could be charged  
with the defeat of the League because of Wilson's unbending  
attitude toward reservations. <sup>26</sup> But a Democratic victory in  
1920 was out of the question; that had been decided in 1918  
when the people chose a Republican Congress in defiance of  
Wilson's request for a Democratic victory. <sup>27</sup> Any Democratic  
candidate was doomed to failure; any Republican candidate faced  
certain victory, with as large a majority as Harding received,  
if not larger. <sup>28</sup> However, the fact that the Republicans consid-  
ered the possibility of defeat indicates the low esteem in which  
the candidate was held by his party brethren. Fortunately for  
the Republicans, the Democrats nominated a man who was not much  
superior to Harding. <sup>29.</sup>

Since there was not much choice between the Candidates  
apparently the Republicans would be successful in their attempt  
to have the election a declaration for or against the policies  
of President Wilson. <sup>30</sup> Their strategy would be to make use of  
the mass reaction against the war to win the election for  
themselves. The entire responsibility for the events of the  
past eight years was piled on the frail shoulders of Woodrow  
Wilson; and Harding was seen as the only alternative to Wilson. 31

The voters wanted a change, but they saw no chance of getting

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 529

<sup>27</sup> Thompson, 529

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Agar, 305

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> "The Election of Mr. Harding," in The Outlook, November 10  
1920, 454

it by returning the Democratic party to office. In 100  
desperation Cox insisted that he, and not Wilson, was the  
candidate; but the people regarded him simply as the heir to  
Wilson's policies and practices. In vain did Cox urge the  
people to consider the immediate future, rather than to lament  
the past; but the arguments of a four-month campaign could not  
bury an accumulation of seven years of Democratic policies.

A second appeal made by the Republicans was for a  
return to "normalcy," that word being Harding's chief bequest  
to posterity.<sup>32</sup> The American people were tired: tired from the  
suffering and bloodshed of the war; tired from the expenditures  
the war had demanded in money and morale; tired of crusades  
and noble deeds; tired of idealistic men as leaders. They  
wanted repose and to be left alone. They watched the antics of  
the political campaign with toleration, but little enthusiasm,  
leading one observer to remark that there was more excitement  
generated on the speakers' platform than in the audiences.<sup>35</sup>  
But the fact that the Republican victory was won with a candi-  
date as commonplace as Warren G. Harding made the popular verdict  
against the Democrats all the more crushing.<sup>36</sup> A magazine of  
the day, the Independent, cited three reasons for the Republi-  
can victory: first, that Americans had become, like the Atheni-  
ans, a fickle people; second, that the decision was more a

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 White, Masks in a Pageant, 409

35 Schriftgiesser, 79

36 Bailey, 324

37 Kent, 461

psychological reflex action than a judgment; and lastly

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that the vote was a repudiation of America's part on the World War, since it had not been necessary for self defense.

38

William Allen White observed that:

Harding was shunted into the White house as a passionate protest of the people against a number of unrelated things, for which the Democratic party was only partly responsible. For all that had happened during the eight years of Democratic incumbency -- for getting into the war too early; for getting in too late; for getting in it at all; for conscription; for leniency to conscientious objectors, and for punishing them at all; for the debts of the war, for the waste of the war; for the peace as being too hard on Germany, and too tender of her feelings; for the League of Nations, in that it was too loosely defined and too restricted by language; for prohibition, and for the lawlessness that followed; for high taxes and low morals, and chiefly for the complaint called Wilson . . . . all these things the Democratic party answered for at the election which made Warren Harding President. . . . 39

Cox and the Democratic party never had a chance of victory; by the end of October Cox himself was convinced of this, but he gallantly finished his campaign in the same fighting spirit in which he had started. In addition to the unpopularity of Wilson and the reaction against the war, the Democrats were handicapped further by a lack of funds and ended the campaign with a large deficit, as did the Republicans. But it is safe to conclude

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that even with unlimited money the Democrats had a

38 Franklin H. Giddings, "What Did It," Independent, November 20, 1920, 262

39 White, Masks in a Pageant, 410

40 Kent, 460



lost cause. With a clarity of judgment that is enhanced by 102  
a thirty-year perspective, in 1920, it is obvious, the better  
candidate was defeated. When the qualifications of Cox and  
Harding as potential Presidents are compared, there is not one  
instance, except in good looks, in which Cox was outshone. He  
was superior to his Republican opponent in character, ability,  
intelligence, personality, and past record.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Cox  
waged an intelligent campaign which should have entitled him to  
the decision; yet he received the most conclusive defeat then  
recorded in American politics.<sup>42</sup> Cox was the right candidate but  
he was unfortunate in having to run at the wrong time.<sup>43</sup> If he  
had been elected, Cox would not have been like Wilson, for he  
was matter-of-fact in manner, literal-minded and energetic.  
Probably history would not brand him as one of the country's  
greatest Presidents, since that would presuppose knowledge of  
the calamities of the Harding administration which Cox would  
have prevented.<sup>44</sup> After his defeat in 1920, Cox retired from  
public life at the age of fifty, being unwilling to accept a  
minor office after failing to win a major one.<sup>45</sup> In his auto-  
biography, written twenty-six years later, Cox declared that  
the defeat did not leave bitterness in his heart; rather he  
returned to his private affairs contentedly.<sup>46</sup> He described a  
visit made to Wilson in the White House after the election:  
As I walked forward to greet him,

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41 Stone, 32

42 Ibid., 31

43 Ibid., 19

44 Ibid., 34

45 Ibid.

46 Cox, 284

he said, "Stand up, I want to look at you. I don't see how you ever went through the campaign. I marvel at your strength that lasted until the battle was over." . . . 47

The student of history must be wary, however, of the danger in contrasting Cox with Harding in the light of subsequent events, lest Cox assume a stature he did not attain in the political events of 1920.

Franklin D. Roosevelt accepted his defeat in good grace, and made plans to return to active work in the law firm of Emmet, Marvin and Roosevelt. He also became a vice-president of the Fidelity and Deposit Company of Maryland, and was placed in charge of its New York office.<sup>48</sup> It was during the summer of 1921 that he was stricken with infantile paralysis, but neither his physical handicap nor his defeat in 1920 stood in the way of future political successes.

As events turned out, the Republican party interpreted its sweeping victory in 1920 as a popular mandate against joining the League of Nations. This decision led to the charge that the American people had been deceived and duped into electing a Republican administration, because of the promises made by some of the prominent pro-League Republicans. Certainly Wilson had called for a popular referendum on the issue; it remains to discover whether the campaign was waged and the ballots marked under the influence of the League. Woodrow Wilson insisted that the League be the paramount issue of the campaign, despite

47 Ibid., 287

48 F.D.R. Letters, 510

the advice of countless men in both parties that the question should be kept separate from partisan politics. These men realized the difficulty of securing a true referendum; therefore, they hoped to keep the possibility of joining the League alive by keeping the issue out of the campaign. Nevertheless, Wilson persisted stubbornly in his resolve to have the people decide. 49 The spokesmen of the two major parties were not in agreement as to the "paramount" issue of the campaign, as evidenced by the contradictory statements released at different times. Among the Republicans, Taft maintained, together with Lodge, that Wilsonism was the problem to be decided; Harding wobbled over many issues, but talked most about Wilsonism and a world organization. Among the Democrats, Bryan pushed prohibition; Cox emphasized financial "slush" funds; and Roosevelt stated that progressivism was the major issue, although both he and Cox returned periodically to the League. 50

Even if the candidates had taken clear-cut positions on the League, there still would not have been a referendum, because the League was by no means the only issue, though it was clearly the most talked-about issue. Aside from purely local problems, there were about a hundred issues or subjects for discussion, ranging from the Armenian mandate to the tariff on California lemons.

The Republicans concentrated their fire on Wilsonism. . . and the sins of the war government. . . . The Democrats emphasized the treaty, but also progressivism versus reaction, with special attention to the Senate

49 Bailey, 342

50 Ibid., 339

oligarchy and the "smoke-filled" room. To say that the final vote was a clear mandate on any one of the scores of issues involved is plainly absurd. 51

Perhaps their selection of a candidate indicated that the Democrats were reluctant to accept the League as the chief issue of the campaign. 52 But after eight years in office the party was on the defensive, and the leaders realized that there was no hope of victory in negation. In search of a positive issue, the only one which seemed important enough was the League question, so they seized upon it. 53 However, it was impossible for the Democratic candidate to convince the American people that peace was contingent upon the acceptance of the League covenant. Then, toward the close of the campaign, when Cox revealed his willingness to accept reservations, he betrayed the party's one hope for victory. 54 The New York Times observed a few days after the balloting:

Now that the election has been held, it remains true, as we pointed out in January, that it cannot be said that the contest was decided upon the Treaty issue. It was anything, everything but that. . . . Still, the Democrats were forced to make the League of Nations their chief issue -- they had no other. A campaign of defense and extenuation would have been hopeless. 55

In the face of a seven-million vote plurality, practical Republican politicians were afraid to make any overtures

51 Ibid.

52 Holcombe, 312

53 Bailey, 321

54 Holcombe, 304

55 Editorial: "The 'Solemn Referendum'", New York Times, November 4, 1920

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toward a League membership. Harding announced, two days after his victory, that the League was now "deceased." Other party leaders looked upon the vote as a mandate to do anything whatever.

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The election of 1920 did not reveal a growing strength within the Republican party, since their large majority was caused by two distinct factors. In the first place, 1920 was the first national election in which women could vote, therefore the total of eligible voters was much larger than that of any previous election. The second reason was that an increasingly large part of the electorate swung from one party to the other without regard for tradition, party affiliation or principles.

58

Just who was this Senator Harding, in whom the people had evinced so much confidence? His career in state politics had been uninspiring, serving two terms in the Ohio senate, one term as lieutenant-governor, and suffering defeat as a candidate for governor by James M. Cox. In 1915, when he was fifty years of age, he became a United States Senator; the following year he was made permanent chairman of the Republican National Convention which nominated Charles Evans Hughes as party standard-bearer.

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Harding, in his six years in the Senate, talked much without saying anything of importance. He was, however, a loyal member of the Lodge-Penrose faction, and he voted as ordered.

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56 Myers, 451

57 Bailey, 338

58 "The Landslide and its Meaning," Current Opinion, December, 1920, 761

59 White, Masks in a Pageant, 390

60 Ibid., 392

He had helped defeat the ratification of the League. He had voted in favor of the prohibition amendment and the Volstead Act; he had cast eleven votes unfavorable to labor. He had opposed making income-tax returns accessible to the public. He had decried all measures which would in any way constrict the wealthy or their corporations. He had tried to prevent the confirmation of Louis D. Brandeis for Associate Justice of the Supreme Court. And except for his initiative in proposing that the government allow the Sons of the Veterans Reserve to use discarded army rifles, . . . Harding tailed the erudite Lodge.  
 . . . 61

Of the 134 bills he introduced, ninety per cent were concerned with purely local matters. The measures he proposed included a resolution to encourage the teaching of Spanish in the United States, a bill to celebrate the anniversary of the Pilgrims, a bill to create an American Battlefield Commission, and a bill to investigate the claims of Indian tribes.  
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Personally, he was the typical small-town politician with a carefree, easy-going nature. That his mind was narrow and limited was evidenced by his befuddled statements and actions, and also by the ease with which he could be influenced. His vision could not penetrate into the problems of his age. <sup>4e</sup> He was sympathetic with the individual man, but failed to understand the masses of humanity. In this last detail, he was just the reverse of Woodrow Wilson. Harding valued friends, and delighted in rewarding loyalty with a political favor or job; but

61 Minton, 36

62 Ibid., 35

63 Adams, 189

he lacked the insight to differentiate between true friends and those who would betray his trust and confidence. That he recognized his intellectual limitations was proven by his reluctance to enter the race for the highest office in the land, and also his oft repeated statements that if and when elected, he would seek the advice of the "best minds" of the nation.

Had Harding been permitted to remain as he was happiest, the leader of politics of a small town, he would not have gone down in American history as one of the worst, if not the worst, President. But he was pushed beyond his capabilities, and lacking any reserve strength, he was a miserable failure. Certainly Harding was responsible for the many scandals of his Administration, in that he made the appointments to offices where the opportunity for graft and dishonesty was rife. But in a larger sense, the Senators who foisted him upon the American people in 1920, were more guilty. Sensing the prevailing attitude of reaction, aware that the time was ripe for a Republican victory, the Old Guard passed up many men more qualified than Harding and chose a third-rate party hack simply because of his inoffensiveness. The Democrats were guilty of the same sin, but it was not so reprehensible because they were facing certain defeat.

Wilson must be allotted his share of the blame for the events resulting from the election of 1920. Had he not persisted in his stubbornness and refused to heed advice, the

election would not have taken the form of a solemn referendum against the League of Nations.

The American voters had an easy choice to make on November 2, 1920. There was little difference between Harding and Cox, both were mediocre. There was little difference in the party platforms, and the speeches of the two major candidates did nothing to create a difference between Republican and Democrat. The people wanted a change. Therefore they voted the Democratic Wilson out of office and replaced him with the Republican Harding.



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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Jeanne Demling has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Sept. 13, 1910  
Date

James V. Jacobson, S.F.  
Signature of Adviser (M.S.)