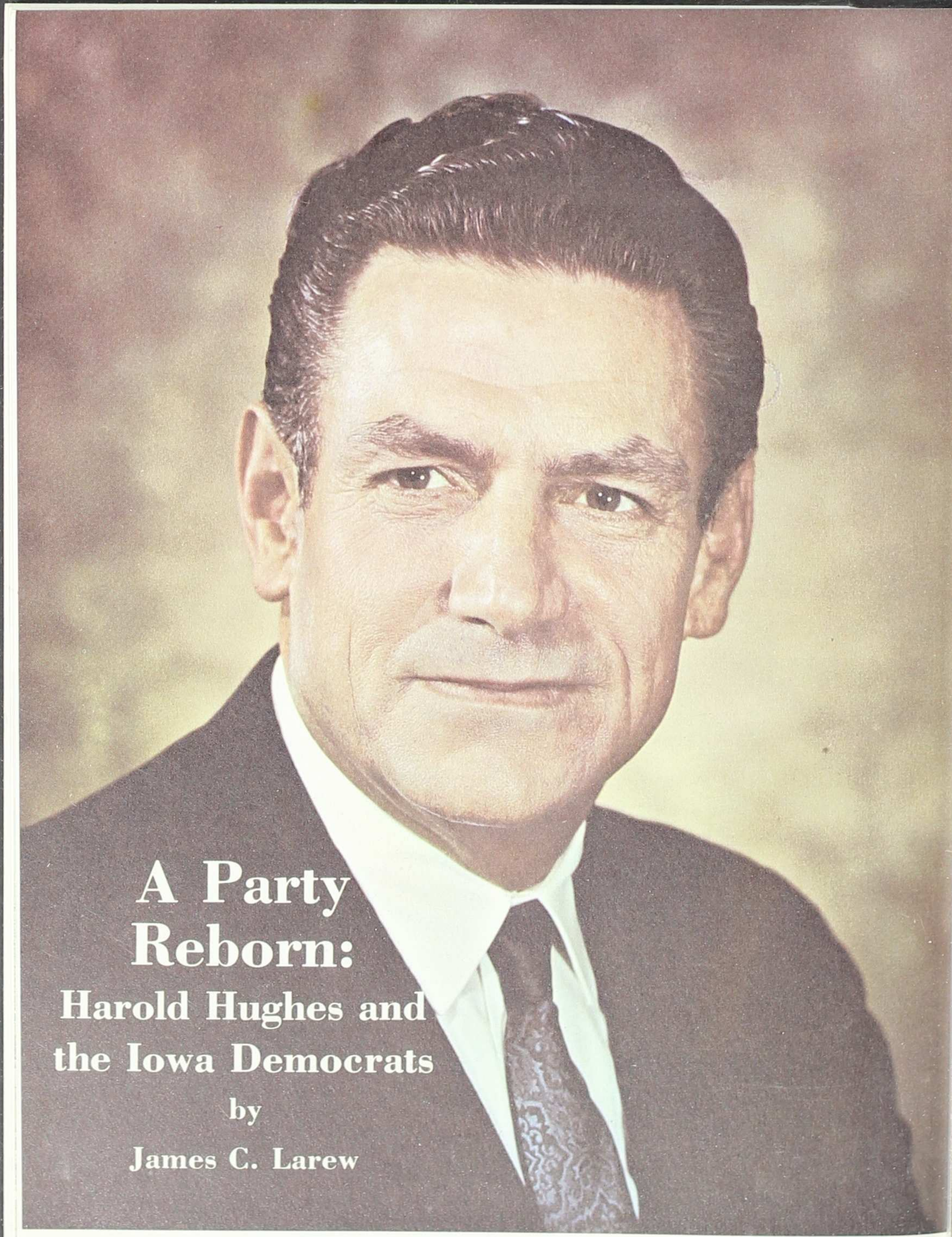

A Party Reborn:

Harold Hughes and the Iowa Democrats

by

James C. Larew

Harold Hughes (courtesy Division of Historical Museum and Archives)

After the Civil War, the Republican Party–with few exceptions–dominated Iowa politics. James C. Larew argues in his book A Party Reborn, *forthcoming from the State Historical Society this winter, that the 1960s witnessed a change in Iowa's political power structure that had been building from the New Deal and that became symbolized in the governship of Harold Hughes. The following excerpt chronicles Hughes' rise and the forces behind it.*

A fully annotated version of the book manuscript is on file at the State Historical Society.

– Ed.

In January, 1963 Harold E. Hughes emerged as the solitary standard bearer of the Democratic Party of Iowa. His assuming the Governor's chair marked the beginning of what would be one of the most amazing political careers in the state's history—one that would lead him eventually to the United States Senate and to an abortive try for the Presidency in 1972, followed shortly thereafter by his surprising decision to leave the Senate and devote his life to Christian lay work.

Upon the announcement of his retirement from the Senate in 1973, the *Des Moines Register* wrote: "Harold Hughes had not completed his second term as governor of Iowa when it became obvious that state government would never be the same again. Or state politics." Indeed, the Democratic Party of Iowa to a significant degree had become the personal party of Harold Hughes, and under his leadership it had gained power, prestige, and, to a large extent, a new constituency.

Hughes' dramatic success resulted at least partially from three related factors: his outspoken, issue-oriented and aggressive political style (at a moment when such a style was especially appropriate); his keen political advisors (who augmented his own ability to translate progressive and sometimes alien ideas into the "common sense" sentiments of the state's citizens); and a personality that enabled him to re-establish a sense of community in a state fractured by the rapid changes of the post-war years.

The style of Harold Hughes was astonishing in its contrast to that of earlier Iowa politicians. One of "forthrightness and candor that is exceptional in politics," as the *Des Moines Register* noted, it was also a style peculiarly well adapted to new political realities of the 1960s, both in Iowa and throughout the nation.

During the Eisenhower years and before, many American voters had defined themselves by their unwavering party affiliations, often inherited from ethnic and familial traditions. For the most part, only uncommonly strong personalities or unusually successful or inept administrations caused temporary changes in a voter's allegiances. Less often had partisan loyalties been based upon the policy alternatives of opposing parties or candidates.

By the early 1960s, however, American political behavior had altered dramatically. The importance of a candidate's personality increased, combining with a new cluster of political issues to overpower past patterns of voting behavior, patterns that had been based largely on party loyalties. The change from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy/Johnson administration, and the subsequent Goldwater/Johnson presidential race of 1964, focused the previously blurred issues, clearly delineating conservative from liberal positions on major social questions. The emerging social issues—race relations, war, welfare, income distribution, size of government—were no longer seen as abstract matters, but as important problems directly affecting the lives of individual citizens. This new concern for issues now infused American politics, ripping at the partisan fabrics first

woven with traditional threads. . . .

Harold Hughes was ideally suited to this new era of issues and personalities. In his victorious 1962 campaign Hughes had been most outspoken on the question of liquor reform, but he had also embraced a broad program of progressive alternatives, which he presented to an Iowa public that was eager for change and a discussion of these issues.

Of course, Hughes was endowed with the natural abilities and assets that have benefitted politicians in all times. A rugged, handsome man, he carried his massive six-foot three-inch frame gracefully, spellbinding crowds with a deep, hypnotic voice. Hughes also possessed credentials from the common experiences of his state's culture, credentials that gained the respect of Iowa voters. In high school, he had been an all-state football player, state champion in the discus throw, and even an all-state tuba player. He had dropped out of college to fight in World War II, returning to Iowa to establish his own small trucking bureau.

In addition to his personal attributes, Hughes' fortunate access to prudent political advisors was an important key to his effective leadership. One man in particular —Park Rinard—ushered in the ascendency of Harold Hughes. An unusual personal background had prepared Park Rinard for his role in Iowa politics at a time when the state's rural past and urban future were in collision. A liberal, a highly articulate man, and a good writer, Rinard was extraordinarily sensitive to the basic sentiments of Iowans. He had acquired this sensitivity, in part, while serving as executive secretary and close friend to Iowa painter Grant Wood. Some years later, Rinard had joined the staff of Democratic Governor Herschel Loveless as administrative assistant. At that time, perhaps before anyone else, Rinard had recognized Harold Hughes' potential and strongly encouraged him to embark on a political career of his own—as a Democrat.

Hughes, in his earliest political activities, as a Republican, had been elected delegate to several GOP state conventions. Subsequent frustrations with that party, however, and personal conflicts with the state Commerce Commission—which was Republican-controlled and which regulated his own trucking bureau—had prompted Hughes to change his party affiliation. In 1958, with the encouragement and advice of Rinard, Hughes himself ran for Commerce Commissioner, as a Democrat—and won. Two years later, Hughes made his first, though unsuccessful, attempt for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. From those initial campaigns, Rinard served as Hughes' principal strategist and advisor. He remained such until Hughes retired from political life in 1974.

Although Rinard and Hughes together had a major impact upon Iowa politics, their relationship was in itself largely invisible to Iowans. Throughout Hughes' tenure as Governor, Rinard served not on the Governor's staff, but as head of an urban interest group, the League of Iowa Municipalities. From that post, Rinard conducted daily telephone deliberations with Hughes. For six years, from 1962 to 1968, while Rinard served as the Governor's closest confidante, he also acted as lobbyist for the League, advancing causes in the corridors of the statehouse, causes he had already discussed and planned privately with Hughes.

Rinard's ability to see political matters with one eye as a grass roots Iowan and with the other as a political liberal helped to shape Hughes' own beliefs and to direct his political impulses. Edward Campbell, an-

Park Rinard (courtesy Des Moines Register)

other aide close to Hughes, has called Rinard "Hughes' closest ally," one of "the best political strategists in the state," and "one of the best writers in the country."

With Rinard's counsel and polish, Hughes combined his own oratorical powers to talk simply and forcefully about the emerging issues of the day. Iowans perceived in Hughes an uncommon sense of personal integrity and appreciated perhaps even more Hughes' conviction that governmental actions, properly conceived, and individual interest, unselfishly sacrificed, could be combined to renew the bonds of community in Iowa.

In important and highly visible ways, Hughes showed a willingness to place his understanding of the general good above what seemed to be his own natural inclinations. It seemed unusually bold and honest for an admitted alcoholic to desire repeal of the last vestiges of Prohibition from the state Code when many Iowans cowered in "key clubs" to do their drinking. As an avid hunter and gun collector in a state filled with hunting enthusiasts, Hughes became an increasingly outspoken advocate of gun-control legislation. And, himself a small-town descendant, he stormed through the state rallying forces to increase the political power of Iowa's urban residents through legislative reapportionment. In many ways, Hughes forced Iowans to assume a new integrity.

Hughes' unorthodox approach to politics and an enigmatic quality about his personality appealed to a wide variety of Iowans. As Governor, he displayed characteristics and mannerisms not seen before in the chief executive's office. At times the restless and individualistic cowboy spirit that possessed him seemed more appropriate to his earlier vocation as a truck driver than to his new position as head of a state government. He was instinctively more at ease hunting and fishing with a few old friends, it seemed, than working in the confines of the governor's office. On one particularly intense day during his first term of office Hughes stepped out the back door of the state Capitol, walked to the Des Moines River, which runs through the middle of the city, and cast a fishing line over the guardrail of an avenue bridge.

Not just a roughly-hewn truck driver caught in a constricting bureaucracy, Hughes personified many of the essential cultural contradictions of Iowa. The most pronounced of all the contradictions in Hughes' personality involved his very real struggle to discover a personal religious unity amidst competing and opposing spiritual impulses—a personal struggle he often confronted publicly through various religious endeavors. When he was still a young man, his wrenching combat experiences in World War II and the tragic automobile death of his older brother plunged him into a personal chaos for which his Methodist upbringing in Ida Grove had not adequately prepared him. His youthful conception of a warm and friendly God was shattered. He recoiled from the torments of his doubts in a succession of alcoholic

stupors over a ten-year period. "I couldn't understand a loving God allowing these things to happen," Hughes later recalled. According to his own account, he even contemplated suicide. Instead, swearing off liquor, he committed himself to a renewed and transfigured Christian faith.

As a practicing politician in the decades following his spiritual rebirth, Hughes displayed enormous evangelical energy, attempting to save individual citizens and political peers from the torments of alcohol, drugs, and lives unredeemed. But he intertwined his message with a gospel reflecting his own profound desire to improve social conditions as well as individual souls. With one hand welded to Iowa's agrarian, evangelical past that included men and women who, like himself, were ruggedly spiritual and politically individualistic, Hughes grasped with the other hand a line tying him to a social-Christian tradition, forcing him to seek progressive, collective means to ease societal ills.

The often conflicting demands of evangelical and social Christianity created a constant tension within Hughes. Sometimes he unnerved his fellow politicians when he left their meetings—both as Governor and as Senator—to counsel ailing alcoholics and narcotics addicts who requested his personal guidance. When he resigned his Senate seat in 1974 to devote himself to evangelical lay work, Hughes stated his belief that his conflict was not resolvable through rational thought and action, but through faith alone:

> I've looked at this in every way. . . . I've explored all these things you ask about. I know I have a responsibility to my family, staff, state, party, and nation. This decision affects all of them. But when I weighed it all, I knew that the Lord has directed my life until now; and he will use my life for a greater purpose. I can't explain it to you, but I have absolute faith that it is true. . . . I will be just as interested in social problems as I've ever been; I fail to see that this move will affect that.

To seek religious and political reconciliation became the salient theme of Harold Hughes' public career. That a man like Hughes, conscious of such deep fissures within himself, would lead many Iowans in their own search for a new community was startling. And yet, perhaps only such a person, riddled with many of the same tendencies and contradictions that troubled the state as a whole, could have had such a far-reaching impact upon Iowa politics in those years when the state was transformed from rural to urban domination. . . .

As Governor, Hughes stood in stark contrast to his predecessors. Speaking to an overwhelmingly Republican legislature in his first inaugural address in January, 1963, the new Governor admonished: "It is sometimes said that the knack of skillful government is to hang back, do as little as possible, and make no mistakes. I hope there is another way—for between you and me, this prospect does not invite my soul."

Anxious to introduce Iowa to a new era of progressive politics attentive to what he felt were the neglected needs of the state's citizens, Hughes established the central theme of his administration's first two years in that first speech to the Legislature: "As I see it, we have no choice—if we are to keep faith with our oaths of office. Our constitution states that 'all political power is inherent in the people.' . . .the differences that divide us as partisans are small by comparison with the common ground that unites us as fellow Iowans."

Urban turf formed the common ground upon which Hughes built a bi-partisan coalition. He pushed a wide range of social legislation before the General Assembly, the kind of legislation urban lawmakers of

both parties had promoted for nearly a decade, but which strongly entrenched rural interests had effectively resisted. Largely because of the Governor's leadership, party affiliation mattered less in the 60th General Assembly than in any session since World War II. Instead, in what reflected a marked change from the 1950s, urban-rural differences took precedence over partisan division on a wide range of issues. From 1951 to 1955 only the reapportionment and butter-oleomargarine controversies managed to bring urban-rural differences to the surface; but in the 1963 session this division was evident in the battles over most major bills, many of which directly affected cities and towns. Cooperation between Democrats and Republicans from urban counties brought substantive changes to Iowa law.

Hughes mandated legislative breakthroughs in such areas as taxation formulas, reapportionment, public utility regulation, fair employment practices, and workmen's compensation increases. But Iowans remembered the session not for such complex (though important) matters as taxation formulas. It was the repeal of the liquor-by-the-drink laws that caught the attention of the voting public. Harold Hughes himself later observed, "Liquor by the drink was probably the least important thing I did, even if it is the most remembered." But despite Hughes' comment, repeal was important because it symbolized a new political attitude in the state. The same Republican party whose majorities had avoided the liquid issue for more than a decade now publicly committed itself to change when prodded by Hughes. And the Democratic party, having carried through its most important platform pledges, was now demonstrably allied to progressive causes.

Hughes did suffer one major setback during the session, but even this he ultimately transformed into a boost for his party's progressive image. Over the Governor's vociferous objections, the Republican majority approved—as had the previous General Assembly—the reapportionment amendment known as the Shaff plan, named for its author, Senator David Shaff of Clinton. The hotly contested Shaff amendment called for a bifurcated scheme of apportionment whereby the larger House would be apportioned according to districts of equal area and the Senate by districts of similar population sizes.

Many urban opponents of the plan called it an "upside down and backwards" scheme, because it mirrored rather than duplicated the national government. These opponents claimed such a plan, skewed to favor land rather than population concentrations, would allow for a continued rural domination. On the other hand, rural interest groups such as the Iowa Manufacturers Association (IMA) and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), supported the Shaff plan, as did some urban legislators. Those groups contended it was an improved, though imperfect, answer to Iowa's reapportionment needs.

As required by law, Iowa prepared for a special election to approve or reject the Shaff amendment. Against great odds and the advice of Democratic party Chairman Lex Hawkins and others predicting scenarios of the Governor's humiliation, Hughes stumped the state calling for the defeat of the amendment. Moderates and conservatives joined with the IMA and the IFBF to encourage its endorsement. In a surprising upset, in December, 1963, Hughes and the urban forces defeated the Shaff Plan.

The Governor then called a special session of the legislature to draw up two new

reapportionment plans: a "temporary" plan to be used in the quickly approaching 1964 elections; and a "permanent" plan subject to the normal and lengthy amendment-ratification procedures. Even though the temporary plan increased urban representation, 47% of the electorate could still elect a majority of representatives while 39% could still elect a majority of senators. . . .

The 1962 gubernatorial victory of Harold Hughes had been largely a personal one. He carried few other Democrats with him into office. The Republicans captured 236 of 304 county offices, all state executive offices (except the governorship), six of seven Congressional seats (Neal Smith was the lone Democratic winner), and a United States Senate seat—in addition to the vast majority of the seats in the General Assembly.

But as the Democrats faced the 1964 elections, they did so from a posture of increasing strength, confronting a Republican Party torn by internal divisions. The Presidential candidacy of Lyndon Johnson further enhanced the progressive image Harold Hughes had cultivated in his first term as Governor. In 1962 Lex Hawkins prophesied, "Democrats may not win the state offices in two years, but in four to six years Iowa will be Democratic."

When Iowa joined the 1964 Johnson landslide and an unprecedented number of Democrats won state offices, electoral totals seemed to confirm the general impression that 1963 had been a watershed year. From this point Iowans voted for Democrats with increased frequency, and more importantly, an increasing number of them identified themselves as Democrats.

In that 1964 election, six of seven Democrats running for Congress defeated their Republican opponents. Only H.R. Gross of the Third District survived among the GOP candidates. At the statehouse, Democrats won control of both houses of the Legislature for the first time in 30 years. They now held 100 of 124 House seats and 34 of 59 Senate positions in a legislature newly expanded by a court-ordered temporary reapportionment plan.

This increased strength derived substantially from the 25 additional seats assigned to the state's most populous counties. Polk County's House delegation, for instance, increased from two to eleven members, and the same county now had three senators rather than one—all Democrats.

The new Assembly was also notable because of its youth. No freshmen member was over 48 years old, and 100 of the 183 legislators were new. Probably no session since the first General Assembly in 1846 could have claimed less political experience. In addition, significantly fewer farmers and significantly more blue collar workers served in this session than in any since the close of World War II.

The members of the 61st General Assembly desired reform, but they were flexible as to what shape they might give to change. From the very start Hughes and his associates did much of the molding. As the session opened, Hughes startled members of both parties when he announced his preference for the House Speakership—New Hampton Democrat Vincent Steffen. This was an unprecedented move in Iowa politics. Legislators had always considered the appointment of the Speakership a privilege of the majority party, an internal matter to be settled without interference from the executive branch. Equally shocking was State Chairman Lex Hawkins' appearance at the House Democratic caucus to argue for the choice Hughes had made—a choice House Democrats were finally persuaded to accept. In the Senate, newly-

elected Democratic Lieutenant Governor Robert Fulton presided. Fulton, too, was Hughes' personal choice, and he was perhaps the shrewdest member of either chamber. Unlike the preceding session when Hughes seemingly had acted alone, the Governor strongly tied the 1965 General Assembly to his own will. This proved effective, and the session accomplished more than any other since that of 1846.

For the first time in a century a single General Assembly passed eight constitutional amendments. These dealt with divergent issues: the legalization of bingo games; a new formula for apportioning the Legislature (the "permanent" plan designed to conform with the U.S. Supreme Court's 1964 one-man, one-vote decision); annual sessions of the Legislature; and the teaming of Governor and Lieutenant Governor candidates on party tickets.

In addition to the constitutional amendments, the legislators unleashed a flood of new laws that rural-dominated Assemblies had dammed behind committee doors for nearly a decade. In the most notable of these new laws, members abolished capital punishment, created a state withholding tax, imposed limits on interstate highway billboards, increased appropriations for state aid to schools by one-half, increased agricultural land tax credits to help relieve property taxes, authorized four new vocational-technical training schools, permitted county supervisors to create the office of public defender, increased workmen's compensation and employment security benefits, initiated penal reforms, and revamped guidelines for secondary education in the state.

Hughes promoted "Great Society" attitudes towards taxes and social services, new and primarily progressive taxes that would finance the broadened social service legislation. With the Governor's prodding, legislators increased the state income tax rate levied upon higher income brackets and boosted taxes on cigarettes, on gasoline, on inheritances, and even on hotel and motel rooms.

The legislative foundation laid in the 1965 session altered the Iowa political dialogue. Political leaders of the future would talk about streamlining and improving the administration of the Hughes program, but not even conservative Republicans would talk of abolishing it. . . .

The cumulative impact of the legislation was dramatic, but the most spectacular events of the session involved the issue of "right-to-work" laws. Ever since 1947, when the IMA had helped to push through the state's controversial and stringent labor laws, unions had worked to repeal them. After their unsuccessful efforts in the 1959 session of the General Assembly, labor leaders had concentrated much of their legislative attention on the reapportionment question, hoping that greater urban representation would lead to the election of more Democrats and to an eventual repeal of the right-to-work laws. Not surprisingly, these labor leaders had been among Harold Hughes' strongest allies in his successful effort to defeat the Shaff Plan at the polls in December, 1963.

It is curious that the right-to-work laws continued to be such an important issue in Iowa politics, since many union shops existed in Iowa despite them. In fact, there was little evidence that the laws had hampered union organizational efforts or had unfairly aided management. But it was a highly emotional issue, a symbol not only for the unions, but also for the IMA and the IFBF. The momentum of the past had blinded each to the possibility for compromise and the leaders of all these groups

demanded resolution through outright legislative battle.

Labor leaders looked to the promise of a Democratic sweep in 1964 to assure the repeal of the labor statutes. At the state convention that year, apparently without the knowledge or approval of Hughes himself, labor sympathizers had written into the Democratic platform a plank that read: "the Democratic Party of Iowa recommends action to repeal the so-called right-to-work law."

The insurgence of labor put Hughes in an awkward position. He sympathized with labor's intent, yet he knew three-fourths of the state's citizens favored retention of the labor laws. Polls showed that even a majority of those who called themselves "laborers" supported the right-to-work laws. In other words, while Hughes did favor the legalization of union shop contracts, it was, as Park Rinard recalls, "a political fact of life" that the Governor could not advocate outright repeal of the labor laws. As a result, Hughes groped for a middle ground, hoping on the one hand not to betray the trust of labor or the intent of the convention, while on the other hand trying desperately to keep the new and tenuous bonds among businessmen, farmers, and his administration intact. To make matters more difficult, Hughes himself was uncertain about the nature and impact of the laws in question and at first displayed ignorance of some of their basic provisions.

The ensuing battle between the Governor and labor proved the Republican party did not suffer alone from internal strife. As the Democrats broadened their base they also increased their vulnerability to dissention among the ranks. But the Democrats had a strong and dynamic leader in Hughes, a leader who could force compromises, mitigate bitter emotions, and prevent the fate of deeply-seated factionalism that often plagued long-entrenched parties like the Iowa Republicans.

As the legislative session opened, the Governor tried to explain what had now become his delicate position. Despite the state Democratic platform, which specifically called for repeal of the right-to-work laws, Hughes proposed legalizing "union shops" through "modification"—not repeal—of the laws. The battle lines formed immediately. Baffled and outraged, the eleven Democratic Polk County Representatives introduced their own bill, supported by labor, calling for outright abolition of the statutes. Lieutenant Governor Robert Fulton later remarked of the controversy: "Labor . . . was very influential with the Democrats and, in 1965, we had a knock-down, drag-out fight over who was going to run the party. . . ."

Fuzzy as Hughes tried to make the battle lines appear, opponents pointedly attacked him from many sides. AFL-CIO chief Vern L. Davis continued to criticize the Governor for diverging from the official Democratic platform plank. Republican Chairman Robert D. Ray offered his own explanation of Hughes' strategy: "I think what is happening here is that in order to pacify all elements, the governor has taken a position both for business and for labor by trying to lead people to believe you can have both the right-to-work law and the union shop at the same time. This, of course, is impossible."

In order to salvage his hopes for a renewed coalition, Hughes, in a stunning initiative, attended a Democratic legislative caucus, accompanied by Lieutenant Governor Fulton and party-Chairman Lex Hawkins. There Hughes pleaded with Democrats to put aside the labor issue and pass as many of the less controversial plat-

form pledges as possible. Then he again promised he would work to legalize the union shop through modification, not repeal, of the right-to-work laws.

In a month's time, Hughes convinced labor leaders to formulate a compromise agreement which would, in effect, nullify the state labor law. The agreement called for legalizing union and agency-shop contracts, but did not require the repeal of the labor statute. But when the bill came before the Senate, Republicans and rural Democrats reacted with overwhelming hostility, and Fulton moved to defer action, avoiding certain defeat.

In this climate Harold Hughes made what Park Rinard has since labelled "the big speech which never received the recognition it deserved." Hughes called the Legislature into an unprecedented joint session (never before had a governor called the full body together in mid-session) to announce his administration would shortly present a series of bills to revamp entirely the state's labor laws. One bill, Hughes said, would call for the legalization of the union shop: "Either we believe in collective bargaining or we do not. To me, this is the point on which it all hinges."

Following his speech Hughes once again attended the Democratic caucus to plan strategy and elicit support from rural members of the party. But his attempts failed to avert the defeat of his proposal by a 31-27 margin in the Senate, a defeat made possible by the votes of the seven Democrats who joined the Republican opposition. . . .

The labor-law struggle affected the Iowa Democratic Party in two important ways. First, it demonstrated that Hughes and his party did not intend to bow to the demands and ultimatums of organized labor. Yet they had kept the labor groups as allies. Labor now looked to its own national organizations instead of the Iowa Democratic Party to work for repeal of Section 14-B of the Taft-Hartley Act. The bond between labor and the Iowa Democrats continued to exist, but only because of a mutual concern to advance a broader range of social and political issues.

The second major result of the conflict proved more divisive for the Democrats, ultimately embroiling Harold Hughes and Lex Hawkins in their first—and last—public skirmish. The underlying dilemma had become this: how should the party be structured; and how powerful should the party organization be in its effort to increase Democratic victories and assure candidate loyalties?

Hawkins, as State Chairman, had always been a strong advocate of building powerful party organizations. When the seven Democratic senators had refused to support the Hughes-labor compromise, Hawkins sought to coerce them into greater responsiveness to the party will by writing a new party constitution. Hawkins' charter called for formal party endorsements of primary candidates—obviously a tactic to increase the power of the state organization and to limit the importance of popular primaries.

In seeking support for his party constitution, Hawkins assured party workers that party officials would not be able to abuse the new powers assigned them. Unconvinced, Harold Hughes instantly voiced objections to the endorsement scheme. Had such a plan been in effect when he had first run for office, the Governor claimed, he never would have been governor, because party regulars in those early years had never given him active support. Hughes asserted: "I think this would be a mistake. It would take the nominations

away from the rank and file and put them in the so-called smoke-filled rooms."

Hawkins countered the Governor, saying candidates under the existing primary system were already chosen in a smoke-filled room—the Governor's office itself: "The primary elections may have been wide-open in theory in 1964, but actually the governor and I sat down together and decided who would run for what offices. . . . And I think the best way to do it is to let the representatives at the convention decide who will be the candidates."

As the convention and the upcoming debate on the new constitution approached, Hawkins forced Hughes to compromise. Together they decided that if no one candidate received more than 60% of the vote at a convention, the party could endorse two separate candidates. At the Governor's insistence, they agreed a convention could decide not to endorse any candidates for any office if those in attendance so desired.

In the midst of the battle with the Governor, Hawkins surprisingly announced he would retire from his position after the state convention. By all indications, most delegates came to the Des Moines convention site prepared to concur with Hughes' initial position: that endorsements would ultimately divide the party in heated convention battles and block rising newcomers from obtaining party nominations.

However, in this, his last appearance at a state convention as party Chairman, Hawkins staged his most memorable and spectacular performance. Determined to make the party appear triumphant over Hughes, Hawkins delivered a stunning hammer-and-tong speech. Flinging his coat aside and striding about the convention dais in his shirtsleeves as he thrashed his arms through the air, Hawkins told the delegates they were "wasting their time" supporting

Lex Hawkins (courtesy Des Moines Register)

candidates who did not live up to the party platforms. He repeated his earlier argument, this time in more striking terms, that candidates were presently chosen in smoke-filled rooms—by Hawkins himself—even with the primary system intact:

> I have illegally used the Democratic party machinery in support of candidates whom I wanted.
>
> I have used my power illegally to get Congressman Neal Smith nominated and elected. In 1962 I used the state chairman's job, the party machinery and party money to get Harold Hughes nominated over his opponent.
>
> I am not embarrassed by this. . . . I have been a dictator but the next chairman may not be as benevolent as I am.

The speech electrified the delegates. When Hughes chose not to appear before the convention, delegates approved the Hawkins constitution—with its endorsement provisions intact—by an unexpected two-to-one margin. From all appearances, Hawkins left his Democratic post a champion. His party, his causes, and even his favored candidates had shared the victories under his tutelage, and the future looked promising.

However, the 1966 elections demonstrated that the overwhelming Democratic victories of 1964 were deceptive. Following a long succession of Democratic defeats, 1964 vote totals had created the impression of Democratic strength, but a vi-

able and permanent party organization had yet to be built. Even Lex Hawkins' endorsement scheme proved futile in November, 1966, failing to bolster the organizational foundation. Backed by Hawkins, E.B. Smith had won the Democrats' first (and, incidentally, last) convention endorsement in his bid for the U.S. Senate against incumbent Republican Jack Miller. As if to mock the dramatic convention efforts of Hawkins, Miller romped to a decisive victory, winning—for the first time in any Iowa election—all 99 of the state's counties. Fate treated the rest of the Democratic ticket much the same, as Republicans gained back virtually all they had lost in the 1964 landslide.

But, Harold Hughes continued his winning ways—he became the first Democratic governor in Iowa's history to be elected to three terms. Without an extensive grassroots organization, still conducting an issue-oriented campaign, Hughes attracted a wide, bi-partisan, personal following—a following that obviously did not extend to many other members of his own party. . . .

During his third term as Governor, Harold Hughes launched Iowa into a new phase of social activism. In this, his final term, he convinced a divided legislature to reorganize completely the state's tax structure along more progressive lines and to remodel the government according to more rational schemes. Larry L. King summarized Hughes' accomplishments in *Harpers:*

> Harold Hughes managed effective prison reforms, established a State Law Enforcement Academy, reshaped the Highway Patrol along more gentle lines, and abolished capital punishment. He obtained Iowa's first alcoholic treatment facility and its first public defender; he tripled state aid to education and was aggressive in conserving parks and other public recreational works. His administration got an industrial-safety law and twice increased workmen's compensation benefits, pushed through a bill to control billboard advertising along state highways, and gave the state its first consumer-protection laws of any consequence. His fiscal reforms included repeal of the property tax on household goods and reduction of taxes for the elderly poor, an increase in state income tax, and a tax withholding system greatly aiding revenue collections which had in the past been hit or miss.

In the meantime, Hughes expanded his role as spokesman for a changing Iowa electorate. Iowa voters in November had voiced a deep, if vaguely defined disappointment with President Johnson's policies. Now they saw their Governor, as chairman of the Democratic National Governor's Conference, courageously confront the President at his Texas ranch, conveying the Conference's concern over Johnson's performance.

Hughes also squarely faced perhaps the most polarizing issue in American politics of the post-World War II era: racial discrimination. Even though the state had less than a 1% minority population, Iowa citizens shared in the national alarm and confusion when racial disturbances broke out in other parts of the country. As the slums of other northern cities burned, the Governor himself walked through the quiet streets and into the church basements of pocket ghettos in Des Moines and Waterloo to demonstrate his concern. He also established a Human Rights Commission and pushed for an open housing law, while securing public and private means to aid the unemployed minorities.

It was on the issue of the Viet Nam War, however, that Hughes best personified and symbolized the metamorphosis of moral and political attitudes in Iowa. Both the 1964 and 1966 state Democratic platforms had pledged support for the American war

efforts. Hughes himself, in his 1967 State of the State Message, had criticized war protesters when he described the "backlash" of "anti-warfare." "We seize upon some isolated incident to justify the prejudice we secretly carried in our hearts all the time," he proclaimed. In 1967 he had openly expressed his affection for President Johnson, pledging his support for a President burdened with the responsibilities of war. "I'd be a bangle on Lyndon Johnson's horse," Hughes said.

But, in 1968, after struggling with the Viet Nam issue in a personal as well as public way, Hughes voiced his unequivocal opposition to the American war efforts when he delivered the nominating speech for Eugene McCarthy at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. Upon his return to Iowa, Hughes entered the race for the United States Senate and became one of very few Senate candidates in the nation, of any political persuasion, to run a campaign based on opposition to Johnson's war policies. "I don't care what it does to my campaign," he said, acknowledging his war views smashed headlong against the majority of Iowa public opinion, "I'm interested in saving lives, not in politics. I just want to get the war over with."

Iowans heard deeply divided political views expressed in the 1968 United States Senate campaign, as Hughes faced the challenge of moderate Republican David M. Stanley, of Muscatine. Stanley attacked Hughes' strongest asset—the Governor's image as politician of candor and integrity—by charging Hughes had changed his position on such issues as gun control, right-to-work laws, and the Viet Nam War itself.

Backed by enormous financial contributions made by his own family, Stanley grasped at the domestic and foreign policy coattails of Richard Nixon with a billboard campaign that stated: "Nixon Needs Stanley." Hughes raised his own billboards that responded, "America Needs Hughes," and "New Strength for Iowa." Hughes argued his own record demonstrated a pattern of continuity, not sway. Then, labeling Viet Nam the "Johnson-Stanley War," Hughes relied upon his evangelical style to rally Iowans against the Southeast Asian military incursions, describing the horror of nuclear, germ, and gas warfare, then invoking the gospel's message of "peace on earth, good will toward men."

On election day Hughes barely escaped defeat. The same man who four years earlier had won by more than 400,000 votes now won by less than 6,000. In the rest of the races, Iowa Democrats suffered devastating losses. Behind the strong lead of Richard M. Nixon (who, in Iowa, defeated Hubert Humphrey and George Wallace by a margin of about 50% to 6% of the vote) the Republicans won control of both chambers of the General Assembly, and Robert D. Ray easily defeated former Democratic State Treasurer Paul Franzenburg for the Governorship. . . .

Once in office, Republican Governor Ray deftly filled the progressive void first carved out by the departing Hughes, undermining the compounded Democratic-liberal identity established by the former governor. Combining youthful good looks with an iron will and an unusually even-tempered personality, Ray fought his harshest battles with conservative members of his own party. Yet Ray's style of leadership stood in clear contrast to that of Hughes. Quiet in his assertiveness, Ray most often labeled himself a "political pragmatist," refraining from moralism. Nor did the new Governor seek to involve himself in national issues not directly affecting

Iowa.

It is unlikely Ray attracted the same constituency as Hughes, but he demonstrated that a progressive Republican, as well as a Democrat, could build a political coalition appealing to liberal urban areas. In fact, Ray so completely captured the progressive constituency of the state that several Democratic challengers were now forced to present a more conservative image to voters in order to glean anti-Ray support. . . .

Hughes had understood the frustrations felt by many Iowa voters who were often unable to express themselves on burning national and state issues through established party channels. He had voiced their own dissatisfaction with a party institution more often supporting than challenging unpopular Democratic administration policies. Now, as a member of the "McGovern-Fraser Commission" Hughes pushed hard to reform the Democratic national party structure. And in Iowa, he convinced the 1970 state convention to pass important reforms, broadening its base to represent proportionally "men, women, age groups, racial minority groups and economic groups."

Due at least in part to the activist energies and encouragement demonstrated by Hughes, a whole new group involved themselves in the Iowa Democratic conventions of 1968 to 1972, while the Iowa Republican delegations remained relatively unchanged. Democratic delegates were younger, less experienced in convention politics, and represented a greater variety of occupational groups than their Republican counterparts. Between 1968 and 1972, a new stratum of participants superceded many of the traditional Democratic convention delegates. The corresponding membership of the Republican party, on the other hand, remained relatively unchanged in composition.

As a result, the Democratic party did not collapse because of Hughes' absence from Iowa. Instead, a new generation of Democratic leaders came to the fore to make the solid statewide organizational changes necessary to preserve it, and then to increase those gains Hughes had earlier made in a personal way. The restructuring of party organization (perhaps the most important reason for new Democratic gains in the 1970s) became possible when the enthusiasm and energies of the party's younger, more liberal membership combined with the traditional sources of organizational power, such as labor, to build cooperatively a powerful and rejuvenated party. □

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