

The Progressive Convention

American politics had never witnessed anything like the Progressive party convention which met in the Chicago Coliseum on August 5. A reporter, sent by an anti-Roosevelt paper to write articles ridiculing the convention, quit after the second day: "I can't do it and keep my self-respect," he said. Another replied, "I've experienced religion today." Even Roosevelt was awed and almost bewildered by the enthusiasm of his followers.

This was not the typical American political convention, with noisy demonstrations by "paid shouters" — a technique almost as old as the nominating conventions themselves. Rather it was a gathering of men dedicated to a new vision. Their theme song was the stirring *Battle Hymn of the Republic*. Time after time that song rang through the Coliseum, where a few weeks before all had been bitterness and hatred.

There were lighter moments at the Bull Moose convention — such as the appearance of the California delegation bearing a banner reading:

I want to be a Bull Moose,
And with the Bull Moose stand,
With Antlers on my forehead,
And a Big Stick in my hand.

The Pennsylvania delegation sang "We'll hang Boies Penrose to a sour apple tree as we go marching on." Red bandannas were the symbols of the party, worn around the neck or on the hatband, and they were waved frantically at every excuse. It remained for the New York delegation to lead the convention back to the religious theme as it entered the hall singing *Onward Christian Soldiers*.

The delegates to the convention were of many classes and kinds. There were "cynical, hard-faced professional politicians," anxious to profit from the new movement; there were also men of wealth who preferred Roosevelt to Taft; and then there were the real Progressives — men, and women too, who were dedicated to a program of social justice, who thought they saw in the formation of the Progressive party a new hope for the future.

Many had at first been reluctant to deny their Republicanism. La Follette refused to follow Roosevelt into a movement which the Wisconsin Senator had helped to found; instead, he threw his support to Wilson. Governor Hadley of Missouri, William E. Borah of Idaho, George Norris of Nebraska, and other Progressives deserted Roosevelt in favor of the Republican party, if not of Taft.

The problem facing the Progressive Republicans was a local, rather than a national, one. If they supported Roosevelt nationally, and the reg-



"Wonder Who'll Be Nominated?"

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ular party organization locally, it would be an admission that the aim of the new party was "to elect Roosevelt and nothing more." In order to make the Progressive party a reality, state tickets must be nominated and placed on the ballot, independent of the Republicans. All sorts of schemes were proposed to get around this problem, but none seemed feasible. As a result, most states with a strong Progressive following nominated a full slate of candidates. Iowa's Progressive ticket was headed by John L. Stevens of Boone for governor.

Stevens led the Iowa delegation to the Bull Moose convention in August. Other leading Progressives, careless of their political future, joined the new party. Hiram Johnson of California stayed with Roosevelt, and led his state's delegation to Chicago. After some hesitation, Indiana's popular and famous orator, Senator Albert E. Beveridge, accepted Roosevelt's request that he give the keynote address at the convention. Among newspapermen, Medill McCormick of the *Chicago Tribune* was strong in his support of the Rough Rider. These and many others, besides the great mass of the rank and file of Progressive Republicans, made up the convention at Chicago.

The Bull Moosers met in the same Coliseum which had so recently housed them as Republicans. They used many of the same state standards, probably some of the same bunting and flags. Huge pictures of Washington, Jefferson,

Lincoln, Alexander Hamilton, and Andrew Jackson hung around the walls. Overshadowing these was a huge oil painting of Colonel Roosevelt at one end of the hall, and a "stuffed head of a splendid specimen of a bull moose" at the other.

The first day was marked by the usual formalities of organization and by the keynote address of Beveridge, a great speech in the liberal, progressive tradition.

We stand for a nobler America. We stand for an undivided Nation. We stand for a broader liberty, a fuller justice. We stand for social brotherhood as against savage individualism. We stand for an intelligent cooperation instead of a reckless competition. We stand for mutual helpfulness instead of mutual hatred. We stand for equal rights as a fact of life instead of a catchword of politics. We stand for the rule of the people as a practical truth instead of a meaningless pretense. We stand for a representative government that represents the people. We battle for the actual rights of man.

"Thus he began, and the convention cheered." Beveridge had truly sounded the "keynote" of the Progressive movement. When he closed with the first stirring words of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, his audience rose as a man and thundered out the majestic words and refrain of that mighty song. They were truly a "dedicated people." It was such a sight which led one observer to "experience religion."

The high point of the convention was reached the next day when Roosevelt gave his "Confes-

sion of Faith." His appearance on the platform was greeted with an hour-long ovation. His speech, reported someone with a flair for statistics, was interrupted 145 times by applause. His nomination, and that of Hiram Johnson as his running mate, was a formality, and the convention adjourned with a sense of having accomplished great things.

Americans had experienced three tumultuous political conventions within a few weeks. They now girded themselves for the campaign — a campaign which proved as full of excitement as had the conventions.

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