

Iowa Politics, 1916-1948

Woodrow Wilson entered office on the eve of a great world conflict. Just fifteen months after his inauguration in March, 1913, an assassin's bullet in faraway Sarajevo plunged Europe into war. Wilson was re-elected in 1916, running on the slogan, "He kept us out of war." Iowa, repenting her lapse from Republicanism, returned to her traditional party and voted for Charles Evans Hughes.

The following four years saw America enter the war and help win it; they saw peace treaties signed and plans for a League of Nations drawn up. Woodrow Wilson, ill and distraught, traveled over the country pleading for his cause, a cause that failed under the blows of Henry Cabot Lodge and the Republicans in Congress.

America was tired of war, of Europe, and of the Democrats. In 1920 Warren Harding — the Ohio politician who had nominated Taft at the 1912 convention — was swept into office by an overwhelming majority. In 1924 his successor, Calvin Coolidge, won over a combination of Democrats and a new Progressive party led by Wisconsin's Robert La Follette. The majority of Iowans preferred Coolidge, but more of them

voted for La Follette than for the Democratic nominee, John W. Davis.

The year 1928 was a banner year for Iowans: a native son, Herbert Hoover, was elected to the presidency. America was at the peak of her prosperity, a popular Republican was in the White House, and all seemed well with the world. Then came the fateful market crash in 1929 and a depression which became the worst in the nation's history and which spread throughout the world. America and the Republican party staggered under the blow; it was inevitable that in 1932 the voters would turn to a Democrat for a solution. Iowa gave Franklin D. Roosevelt a majority of over 90,000 votes, in a total of over 900,000, against the once-popular Hoover. Again, in 1936, Iowa voted Democratic, although by a smaller majority.

A measure of prosperity returned by 1940, aided by the outbreak of a second great war in Europe. In 1940 and 1944, in spite of this war, which engulfed the world, Iowa decided it was "time for a change" and cast her votes for Wendell Willkie and Thomas E. Dewey. With 1945 came the death of Roosevelt, the end of the war, and Harry S. Truman as President.

The Republicans now looked to 1948 as a year of victory, their first since 1928. They offered the nation their 1944 loser, Thomas E. Dewey; the Democrats, with many misgivings, presented the

incumbent, Harry S. Truman. On election night the nation sat up late to listen to the returns — the Republicans confident, the Democrats resigned. But the returns did not go according to plans or polls; the Democrats were winning. It was not until mid-morning of the day after election that the Republicans conceded that they had again failed in their bid for the White House. And, surprisingly, in the Truman column was found that “safe” Republican state — Iowa. One hundred years after her first presidential vote, Iowa again had “gone Democratic.”

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