

## The Republican Convention

The struggle for the Republican nomination of 1912 actually began in May of 1910, when Theodore Roosevelt came home from his tour of Africa and Europe. Hardly had TR set foot on American shores before the political pots began to boil. Progressives, angered with Taft's stewardship of the Roosevelt policies, turned eagerly to the former president, urging that he step into the widening breach in Republican ranks. For a time Roosevelt held back and tried to remain neutral, but it was not in his nature to stay out of a fight for long. In August, at historic Osawatomie in Kansas, he outlined his "New Nationalism" in "the most radical speech ever given by an ex-president."

The man who wrongly holds that every human right is secondary to his profit must now give way to the advocate of human welfare, who rightly maintains that every man holds his property subject to the general right of the community to regulate its use to whatever degree the public welfare may require it.

The reaction throughout the nation was spontaneous. "The West rose with a shout"; clubs were formed for "Roosevelt in 1912"; and Nebraska Progressive Republicans called for a ticket with



Roosevelt and Iowa's Jonathan P. Dolliver as his running mate. But while the Middle West and the West cheered, the conservative East trembled. Roosevelt was a Napoleon, cried the Standpat newspapers; he would destroy "for the sake of personal advancement"; he was "little short of a revolutionist." Thus Roosevelt's efforts to heal the breach in his party had succeeded only in widening that gap to frightening proportions.

In Iowa, at the 1910 Republican state convention, an attempt to endorse Taft for 1912 was met with "boos and catcalls," and every mention of the magic name of Roosevelt was cheered to the echo. The platform adopted by the convention, which was dominated by Cummins and Dolliver, was a strong Progressive document.

The primaries of 1910 highlighted the struggle within the Republican party. Taft forces in Iowa fought bitterly against the Progressives led by Senators Cummins and Dolliver; even powerful "Uncle Joe" Cannon spoke in Iowa in behalf of the Standpatters. But when the ballots were counted, Iowa had retired four Taft men from Congress, and offered four Progressives in their places. A small measure of comfort could be found for the Taft men in the fact that their candidate for governor, incumbent Beryl F. Carroll, had defeated the Progressive Warren Garst by a handful of votes. In similar fashion, the 1910 primaries through the land presaged the coming de-



feat of the Old Guard Republicans; the elections in the fall gave control of Congress to the Democrats for the first time in sixteen years.

Since peacemaking had failed, the Republican Insurgents now moved to take over the machinery of the party and oust the Taft forces from control. Late in December, 1910, Robert La Follette led in the formation of the National Progressive Republican League, and in June of 1911 he formally announced his candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination — a year in advance of the convention.

Meanwhile Roosevelt, who did not like La Follette, remained in the background except for editorials in *The Outlook*, which became increasingly critical of the administration of Teddy's former friend, Taft. TR constantly resisted efforts of his supporters to put his name up for the nomination, but as time went on his resistance became weaker — although he still would not say "yes." In February of 1912, when La Follette, harried by overwork, broke down during a speech at Philadelphia, his supporters turned to TR with "indecent haste." Within a few days Roosevelt's "hat was in the ring."

That support for Roosevelt was stronger than for Taft was evidenced in the 1912 primaries in the thirteen states which had just inaugurated the presidential preferential ballot. On the basis of these votes, La Follette won 36 delegates; Taft,



48; and Roosevelt, 278. It would seem that TR had a clear majority of the Republicans behind him. Even Taft's home state of Ohio had declared for Roosevelt.

But the Taft forces were not idle. Long before the spring primaries, the administration forces had been at work, seeing to it that state conventions sent Taft delegates to the national convention, scheduled for Chicago in June. In the South, in particular, the well-worn political technique was followed. Officeholders, known or suspected as Roosevelt men, were threatened with dismissal should they fail to support the President. State conventions were held early—in February and March—before the Roosevelt forces could gather their strength, and solid Taft delegations were elected. Sensing their danger, Roosevelt men hurried southward and tried to block the Taft forces by leading bolts from various state conventions and nominating contesting delegations.

Similar programs were followed in many of the northern states where presidential primaries did not determine the makeup of the delegations. Iowa's state convention was held at Cedar Rapids on April 24, with Taft men in control. The struggle in Iowa, however, instead of being between Taft and Roosevelt, was between Taft and Senator Albert Baird Cummins, the leader of Iowa Republicans since the death of Jonathan P. Dolliver in October, 1910.



The appearance of Cummins and other "dark horse" candidates on the political scene this early was partly the traditional "favorite son" technique, and partly the result of the bitter war of words being waged by the two top Republicans, Taft and Roosevelt. Feeling that the two men, by a vulgar display of animosity, would eventually cancel each other out, many Republicans looked around for a compromise candidate who could bind up the party's wounds. La Follette would not do; he was too radical for the Taft forces, too "ultra-progressive" for the Roosevelt men. Cummins of Iowa, Charles Evans Hughes of New York, and Governor Herbert S. Hadley of Missouri were the men most often mentioned for this peacemaker role. Cummins' popularity at home should have swept him to a quick endorsement by a solid Iowa delegation, but such was not the case. Strong Taft men in Iowa manipulated and "steam-rollered" the Cedar Rapids convention in much the same way that the national convention would later be controlled.

There were 1,481 delegates gathered in the city auditorium at Cedar Rapids on the morning of April 24. A thirty-foot square platform accommodated speakers and some 300 "distinguished guests." The hall was hung with the usual bunting and flags and adorned with the traditional pictures — Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley; Taft and Roosevelt; Cummins, Dolliver, and Allison.



It was a bitter fight from start to finish, but when the smoke had cleared the Taft forces, by a slim 41-vote margin, had forced through their platform and had elected the four delegates-at-large from the Taft ranks. Sixteen of Iowa's twenty-six delegates were pledged to Taft, only ten to Cummins.

This failure of his home state to endorse his candidacy hurt Cummins' chances considerably, but he refused to withdraw. Indication that the convention did not represent the true spirit of Iowa Republicans was at once evident. The Grinnell *Register* claimed that the convention "represented the politicians, not the voters," while the Odebolt *Chronicle* stated that anyone who thought the result reflected the attitude of Iowa Republicans was "a fit subject for consideration by the commissioners of insanity." The Des Moines *Register*, a strong Cummins paper, called it "The Last Convention," predicting that before 1916 a presidential preferential primary law would replace the "intimidation and flimflaming" of state and national conventions.

Similar situations in other states only served to widen the breach among Republicans, a breach which the invective of the two leading candidates did nothing to heal. Americans were being treated to the spectacle of a president and an ex-president of the United States engaged in a duel of name-calling which the Des Moines *Register* termed "common and vulgar." On one day Taft called



Roosevelt "a flatterer of the people," a "dangerous egoist," and a "demagogue." Not to be outdone, Roosevelt replied on the following day with such terms as "puzzlewit" and "fathead," and went on to characterize Taft's intellect "as little short of a guinea pig's." Such was the rough and tumble of politics in 1912.

Small wonder, then, that by the time the Republican national convention met in Chicago on June 18, tempers were boiling. The national committee, which had been holding hearings on contested delegations since June 7, had done nothing to relieve this animus; in fact, it was in these hearings that the Taft forces first showed their hand. There were 254 contested seats at the convention of 1,078 delegates. Sitting daily, from June 7 to the eve of the convention, the national committee, with scant ceremony and a bold display of partisan bias, awarded 235 of the contested seats to Taft, only 19 to Roosevelt. Juggling the evidence to suit their purposes, deciding one way in this contest, the opposite way in another, the stubborn men of the national committee defied the expressed wishes of the majority of the members of their party. Some fifteen members of the committee, including Chairman Victor Rosewater of Kansas, had not been re-elected to their positions by their states, but according to practice they retained their seats until the end of the convention. These "lame ducks" helped oil the Taft steamroller in the face



of an admission by an administration newspaper, the New York *Tribune*, that Roosevelt had 469½ pledged delegates to only 454½ for Taft.

Many must have wondered why the members of the national committee, in the face of certain defeat at the polls in November, worked so tirelessly to defeat the majority of their own party in the matter of the nomination. The answer was that these party men preferred success in the convention, and defeat in the election, to letting Roosevelt gain control of the party machinery. They therefore called up their steamroller tactics and overrode the wishes of the majority, while the nation watched in amazement and growing anger.

During these pre-convention contests, Roosevelt thundered in *The Outlook*: "The contest for the Republican nomination has now been narrowed down to a naked issue of right and wrong; for the issue is simply whether or not we shall permit a system of naked fraud, of naked theft from the people, to triumph." TR's editorial, after the convention had adjourned, was entitled, "Thou Shalt Not Steal."

That the Taft forces desperately needed every vote they could muster was shown on the first test of strength in the convention, the vote on the temporary chairman. In this vote, Taft's choice of Elihu Root was upheld by a vote of 558 to 502. Since it is conceded by historians who have made an objective study of these historic contests that at

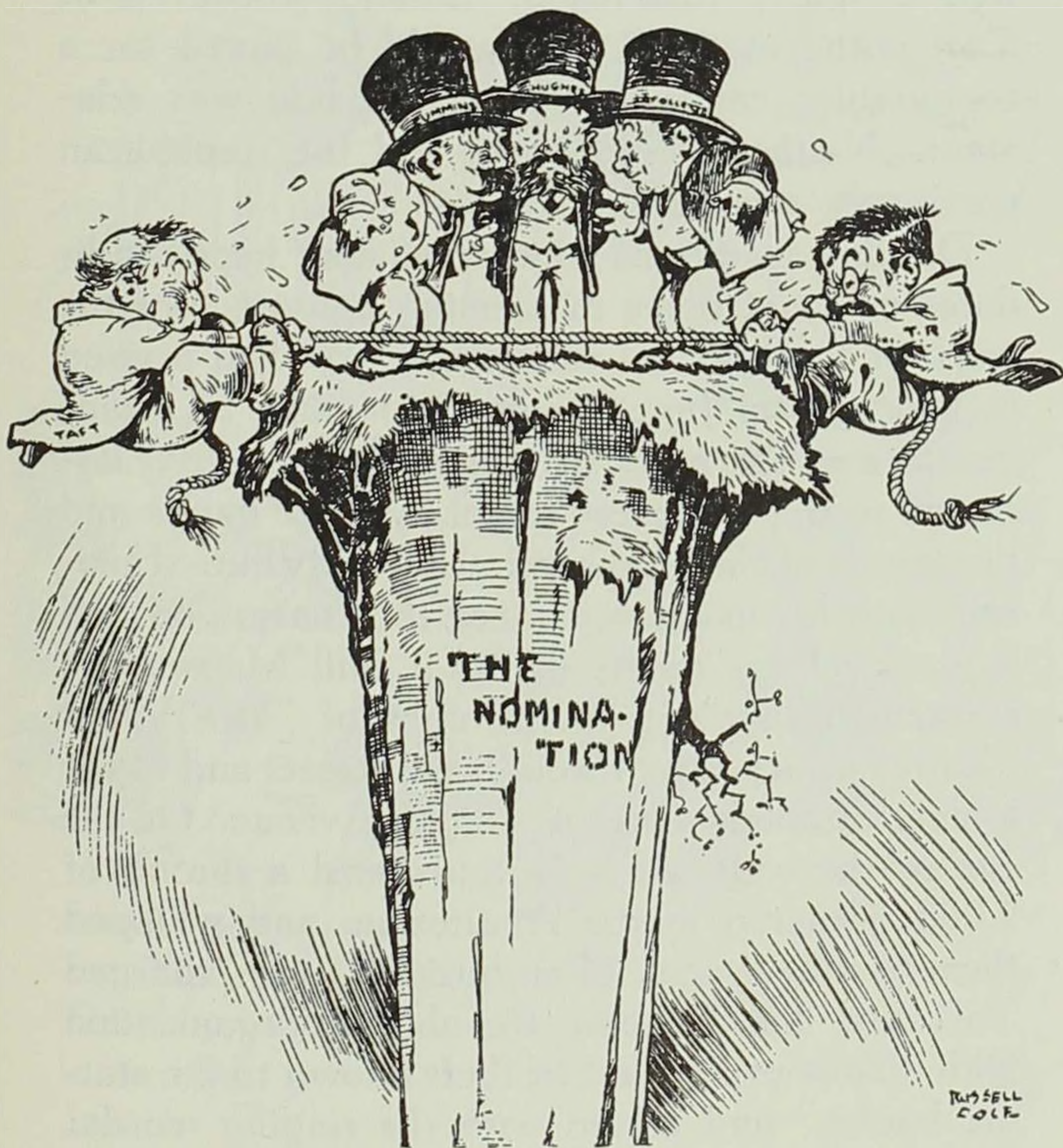


least 30 and possibly 50 more seats should have gone to Roosevelt, it can be seen that a shift of only 29 votes would have given control of the convention to the Progressives. Therefore, the Taft men could not have afforded to let principle interfere with politics in their decisions on the contested seats. The steamroller had triumphed.

As the pre-convention struggle within the national committee ground on, the hopes of the various dark-horse candidates had risen. Iowa's William S. Kenyon, the spark plug of the Cummins boom, felt that he spoke for Iowa Progressives since he had just been nominated for the Senate by a plurality of some 75,000 votes over Standpatter "Lafe" Young. Kenyon therefore hurried to Chicago, opened rooms in the Congress Hotel as Cummins headquarters, and began buttonholing delegates. As the convention date neared, Cummins' chances seemed to blossom. By June 14 support was reported from many quarters. From New York came a former editor of the *Des Moines Register*, the famous "Ret" Clarkson. He "has sniffed the battle from afar," wrote the *Des Moines* paper, "and like an old war horse, cannot be kept from getting into the thick of it." On June 17, the day before the convention opened, the *Register* jubilantly reported support for their candidate from newspapers in Massachusetts and New York.

Similar movements were booming Hadley of





"Who Has a Knife?"

(From the Des Moines Register and Leader, June 8, 1912)



Missouri and Hughes of New York, as the delegates sought vainly for a solution to the snarled web of party dissension. Should Roosevelt or Taft withdraw, the way would be paved for a compromise candidate, but each side was adamant. Neither would yield, and the Republican party split asunder.

Defying tradition, which had long kept candidates coyly at home in seeming ignorance of the work of the national convention, TR had arrived in Chicago on June 15 and had taken up headquarters in the heart of convention activity. Escorted to the Congress Hotel by three bands and thousands of cheering admirers, Teddy hurled himself with his usual vigor into the convention turmoil. Feeling "as strong as a Bull Moose," he responded joyously to the cries of "We Want Teddy" which rang through the streets and in the lobbies of hotels along Michigan Avenue. On the eve of the convention he addressed a throng of 5,000 gathered in the Auditorium and whipped them to a new peak of enthusiasm. He "charged Taft and the Regular Republican organization with almost every kind of theft known to the statute books," and closed with the ringing words: "We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord."

But on the following day enthusiasm turned to despair, as the Taft steamroller moved on inexorably. Tempers flared, speakers were constantly





"Man Is Only a Grown-up Boy"

(From the Des Moines Register and Leader, June 21, 1912)



interrupted by boos and hisses, fist fights were numerous. When Elihu Root was nominated for temporary chairman the speakers were almost drowned out by constant cries of "liar," "thief," and "swindler" from the Roosevelt supporters. Every move of the Roosevelt forces was neatly blocked by the Taft machine; a carefully packed committee on credentials upheld the decisions of the national committee; efforts of Roosevelt men to gain the floor for a hearing were quickly ruled out of order.

Sensing defeat, Roosevelt yet hesitated. Talk of a bolt, of the formation of a third party, had been heard for several days. At last after a long session in Roosevelt's rooms at the Congress, two men came forward with the magic words: "Colonel, we will see you through." They were Frank Munsey, millionaire newspaperman, and George W. Perkins of the United States Steel Corporation. Assured of financial backing, Roosevelt took the final step. On Saturday morning Henry J. Allen of Kansas rose in the convention and read a message from the Colonel which asked his pledged delegates to take no further part in the affairs of the convention. In concluding, Allen cried:

We do not bolt, we merely ask that you do not, and we refuse to be bound by this Convention. We have been with you ten days; we have fought with you five days for a "square deal." We fight no more. We plead no longer.



We shall sit in protest, and the people who sent us here shall judge us.

Dispirited, the convention ground on. Taft's name was placed in nomination by a then unknown Ohio politician, Warren G. Harding; numerous seconding speeches droned through the convention hall. Then came the vote: "Alabama" — "Alabama votes twenty-two for Taft, two not voting." So it went down the alphabet. California, where the national committee had fraudulently awarded two of the state's 26 votes to Taft, cried "California refuses to vote." Without a pause, the clerk shouted through his megaphone, "California votes two for Taft, twenty-four not voting." That the Taft men felt they must wring every vote possible from the convention was again evidenced when a Massachusetts delegate refused to vote during a roll call, and the clerk promptly called his alternate who, by a quirk in the state's primary law, was a Taft man. This obviously illegal procedure was upheld by Root, and in this way two additional votes were added to the Taft column. When it was over, Taft had been nominated by 561 votes — 21 more than he needed. In spite of the Roosevelt ban, 106 had cast their votes for him, while 41 had voted for La Follette, and 17 for Cummins; 344 were "not voting." After a perfunctory nomination of the Vice President, James Sherman, the convention adjourned in the deepest gloom.



But all was not over in Chicago. That night, in Orchestra Hall on Michigan Avenue, Roosevelt "with narrowed eyes and snapping jaws" addressed a cheering mob of supporters, "renounced his Republicanism," and declared his willingness to accept a nomination from a new Progressive party "regularly called and regularly elected." The party of Lincoln had lost, if only temporarily, its most colorful and best-loved member.

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