

## The Political Potpourri

The Iowa political kettle bubbled vigorously in 1935. Undoubtedly the principal legacy bequeathed to posterity was the work of the Forty-sixth General Assembly. Throughout the year, however, a swarm of potential Democratic, Republican, and other office-seekers hustled around Iowa, berating, proclaiming, and apologizing.

For the first time in two generations the Democrats found themselves in control of both houses of the legislature when the Forty-sixth General Assembly convened at Des Moines on January 14th. It was a typical Iowa Assembly, composed mainly of farmers and lawyers. While the Democrats had lost strength in the House of Representatives they still outnumbered the Republicans fifty-eight to fifty. In the Senate they held a favorable balance of twenty-seven to twenty-three members.

A number of vital problems faced the assembled legislators. Governor Herring proposed the creation of three new State departments: a purchasing department, a safety department, and a welfare department — none of which received legislative approval. Other problems dealt with poor

and unemployment relief, liquor control, taxation, mortgage relief, and biennial appropriations.

So difficult and vexing were the problems confronting it, so bitter and at times vituperous the debate, that the Forty-sixth General Assembly gained the dubious honor of remaining in regular session longer than any previous Assembly. When the smoke of battle cleared away and the "fighting Forty-sixth" adjourned on May 3rd, it had been in session 110 days.

One of the most controversial subjects was the chain store tax bill. Designed to handicap that type of merchandising as well as to provide needed revenue, the act levied an unusually heavy tax upon the gross sales of each chain in addition to a specific tax upon each unit. The gross sales feature aroused much opposition and in November, 1935, a United States District Court declared it to be unconstitutional.

The solution of the liquor problem has perplexed Iowans since pioneer days. The Forty-fifth General Assembly wrestled earnestly with this problem following the repeal of prohibition. In 1934 a new method was authorized — the sale of all intoxicating liquor, except beer, by the State government. An experienced commission of three men was appointed in 1934, stores were promptly established, and revenues began to accrue. Before

the first year ended Chairman Harold M. Cooper had given a large number of seals to J. L. Farmer of Cedar Rapids. Farmer was fined \$1000 in February, 1935. Cooper himself was convicted of violating the State liquor law but that decision was later nullified by the Supreme Court. In March the State Executive Council demanded that Cooper explain his conduct or resign within twenty-four hours. Cooper ignored the demand.

Meanwhile legislators learned that Sioux City was a "bootleggers' paradise" and that the speak-easy still lingered in Dubuque. The Decorah *Journal* compared the "handling of hard liquor" with the "handling of dynamite". The Nashua *Reporter* believed that conditions were even worse under State liquor control than in the days of prohibition or the open saloon. "The State of Iowa as well as the federal government", warned the Northwood *Anchor*, "will find the revenues derived from intoxicating liquor sales by the drink will be bitter revenues."

In the midst of these difficulties the General Assembly appointed a special committee to "investigate the operation of the Liquor Control Act". Verne Marshall, crusading editor of the Cedar Rapids *Gazette*, testified before the committee that the "beer joints and brothels" of Sioux City were dominated by the "most pernicious system of crime

and racketeering ever set up in Iowa". On April 26, 1935, Harold M. Cooper resigned.

Charges of graft and corruption were brought against the law enforcement authorities of Sioux City and Woodbury County. Verne Marshall shouldered the brunt of the attack which ultimately brought indictments against Attorney General Edward L. O'Connor, Walter F. Maley, and forty-three others on charges of gambling conspiracy. County Attorney Max E. Duckworth was forced to resign and was later put in jail for contempt of court in refusing to testify. The first trial jury disagreed, 10 to 2 for acquittal of O'Connor, Maley, and eighteen others. In a second trial, in January, 1936, a directed verdict of acquittal was ordered on the grounds that Prosecuting Attorneys H. M. Havner and M. E. Rawlings should not have been present before the grand jury during the investigation of the charges. Meanwhile, Maley had appealed to the State Supreme Court to overrule the refusal of Judge Earl Peters to quash the indictment. After reviewing the circumstances, the high court held that the indictment was invalid. The day before this decision was rendered, Editor Verne Marshall was awarded the Pulitzer Prize "for the most distinguished public service rendered in 1935 by any American newspaper".

Comedy and pathos, honesty and deceit, have marked the path of the Old Age Assistance Law as its first full year of operation was completed in 1935. At least one applicant for aid was a former millionaire. An old lady in Polk County who had been on relief for ten years had her application cancelled when it was found she had property, stocks, and bonds valued at approximately fifty thousand dollars. In several instances pensioners decided to get married in order to pool their slim resources. One pensioner surrendered a Kansas farm. Others have been known to make property transfers to prevent the filing of a lien. At the end of the year 50,599 had made applications, 14,874 had received pensions, and, subtracting deaths, cancellations, and withdrawals, 29,637 applications were still pending. During 1935 the average monthly pension was \$13.50, the average age was over seventy, and the total disbursements were \$1,853,217.83. About a third of the people did not pay the special poll tax levied for this purpose.

The only progress in the direction of a State department of safety was the creation of the Iowa Highway Safety Patrol under the direction of the Secretary of State. The act authorized the employment of not more than fifty-three highway patrolmen who must be physically and mentally fit, citizens of Iowa, of good moral character, and

not less than twenty-five years of age. Not more than three-fifths of them at one time may belong to the same political party. The salary of the patrolmen was fixed at \$100 per month with a five dollar increase each year until the maximum of \$125 is reached. A school for instruction was begun on June 15, 1935, with ninety-seven men present. Eighty-nine completed the work and fifty were appointed. Subject to call at any time and working a minimum of seventy-two hours a week, Iowa's nattily attired patrolmen have played a conspicuous part in traffic improvement.

An index to political confusion was the varied character of the leaders who visited the State in 1935. Huey Long "blasted" Roosevelt before the Farmers Holiday Association in the State Fair Grounds. He advocated \$5000 homesteads for every family and annual incomes above \$2000.

President Glenn Frank of the University of Wisconsin delivered a lecture on "Social Decisions Ahead" at the University of Iowa in June. He was followed in July by Harry L. Hopkins who described the distribution of national income as "ridiculous" and warned that huge incomes were doomed. "We are not going back", declared the fiery head of the WPA, "to the day when the American citizen did not get his share."

Dr. Francis E. Townsend spoke at Marshall-

town and Des Moines. "Let us abandon both old parties and leave them to their nefarious devices", he told his Des Moines audience. "I say we should join hands as a brotherhood of people and do the things necessary to abolish poverty, crime, ignorance and the lack of opportunity that goes with poverty."

Speaking before a Des Moines luncheon audience, Norman Thomas expressed himself as "sympathetic" with Henry A. Wallace's claim that agriculture should have the benefits that the tariff had given industry. He disagreed, however, with "subsidizing scarcity in the name of abundance." Back home to Des Moines came Wallace himself to assail "reactionaries and hell-raising boys who claim to represent views of left-wing farmers."

Franklin D. Roosevelt was the dominating political personality in 1935. The *Decorah Journal* thought that staying in the "middle of the road" with Roosevelt was a "mighty sensible program and slogan" for Americans. The *Algona Upper Des Moines* hailed the President as a "fighter" and an "inspirational leader who refused to be dictated to by any one group or unit of citizens." While mindful of the President's great personal popularity the *George News* pointed out that "not all those who like Roosevelt like the Democratic administration."

As the year came to a close, however, a growing undertow of opposition to Roosevelt could be detected. The Afton *Star-Enterprise* attributed this to the President's "failure to carry out his pre-election program". A similar grievance was felt by the Manson *Journal* when it bitterly referred to a "lot of new promises" in Roosevelt's Atlanta address. The Pella *Chronicle* was more charitable: "We are not blaming either Hoover or Roosevelt for the conditions. They simply made promises that were not fulfilled."

Bewildered by their decisive defeat in 1934, the Republicans took inventory in 1935 to see how best to retrieve their fortunes, while the Democrats conjured ways and means for attaining their third consecutive biennial victory. The Colfax *Tribune* contended that "both parties would be better off if they would bring in some new blood." The Alton *Democrat* urged the "elimination of Ed O'Connor and Clyde L. Herring from political office" in the June primaries, and the Marengo *Pioneer-Republican* suggested that if the Republicans wanted "another terrific beating" they should "nominate some already battle-scarred warhorse such as Hoover, Borah or Dickinson".

By the close of 1935 political thought was beginning to crystallize. A poll by the American Institute of Public Opinion in December revealed

that employment, economy in government, and neutrality were considered the three great issues. Next in order came such problems as reduction of taxation, preservation of the constitution, ending the depression, less governmental control in business, repudiation of the New Deal, the Townsend plan, labor problems, farm conditions, and pensions. All these issues were debated in the Iowa press. "Sane thinking people", warned the *Toledo Chronicle* "are going to want to know what they get for their tax money and insist that they get a full dollar's value for every dollar spent." The *Bellevue Herald* branded war as "horrible". The *Clarinda Herald-Journal* feared the possibility of the Federal emergency measures becoming permanent. "Nobody", the *Humboldt Independent* assured its readers, "is against the Townsend plan except those who don't believe it would work."

There was a minimum of old-fashioned mud slinging in 1935. Most politicians had their ears to the ground listening for a shift of public opinion on the New Deal. The 1936 campaign was still too far distant to warrant committal on the Townsend plan or any other panacea. Parties and politicians were busy straddling issues.

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