

The Political Scene

Party lines were sharply drawn on the Iowa political front in 1936. Basking in the popularity of Roosevelt and the New Deal, Democratic candidates had been swept into office by the two preceding general elections. The Republicans, meanwhile, had suffered in prestige and some people thought the Grand Old Party was dead. But unsuccessful campaigning is not the primary cause of partisan mortality. Encouraged by the adverse decisions of the United States Supreme Court regarding New Deal measures, abetted by the Liberty League, heartened by better times for agriculture and industry, confident in the results of several polls of opinion, the Republicans prepared to resume the rôle of the governing party in 1936.

The first shot in the political campaign was fired as early as January when Lieutenant Governor Nelson G. Kraschel announced that he would run in the primaries for the office of Governor. Governor Clyde L. Herring followed almost immediately with the statement that he would seek the seat in the United States Senate occupied by Lester J. Dickinson. "We are glad", the *Siourney News* announced, "that Herring and

Kraschel finally got their political ambitions threshed out so that they won't tangle in the forthcoming Democratic primary campaign". But the Decorah *Public Opinion* declared that the candidacy of either Herring or Kraschel for a State office was "an insult to the voters of Iowa".

Presently many Iowans began to throw their hats into the political ring: approximately 579 Republican, Democratic, and minor party candidates entered the primaries to seek endorsement for various congressional, state, and local offices. Eleven men sought to become United States Senators and fifty-one were ambitious to hold a seat in the national House of Representatives. Six aspired to be Governor: thirty-seven hoped to be successful in their quest for the seven other elective State executive offices. With such a scramble among the politicians it is rather surprising that a spirit of apathy should have characterized voting at the primaries.

Although cryptic remarks appeared from time to time in the press, it was generally considered that the 1936 primary was the "dullest" in years. One cause of this apathy was the uncertainty of either party winning the general election. Before 1932 the Republicans had always fought a fierce primary battle because nomination almost assured election, while the Democrats had to induce some-

body to "accept the hopeless job of keeping the party alive by running for office, knowing in advance he was going to take a licking."

The State primaries were held on June 1st. Governor Herring carried eighty-four counties to win the Democratic nomination for United States Senator from Congressman Hubert Utterback. "Iowa will never feel ashamed of Clyde Herring", the Knoxville *Express* declared. The Anamosa *Journal* was equally cordial to the nomination. "If the voters of the state send Governor Herring to Washington they may rely upon him to be always for Iowa regardless of whether it advances his standing with the special interests."

Lieutenant Governor Kraschel was victorious over Richard F. Mitchell for the Democratic nomination for the Governorship. The astute livestock auctioneer from Harlan was described as "one of the best salesmen, both of himself and his party, in the Democratic party in Iowa." In choosing Herring and Kraschel, the Democrats endorsed their administration and entered ardent New Dealers in the race for the two highest offices the voters of the State can fill.

There was more confusion of candidates and issues among the Republicans. Smith W. Brookhart, Guy P. Linville, and Edwin C. Manning each strove hard to win the party nomination for

United States Senator from L. J. Dickinson. Speeches and press comments about all of them were decidedly acrimonious. The *Belle Plaine Gazette* felt that Dickinson would make a fine Senator from an eastern State. "While we are not particularly friendly to Senator Dickinson we resent Manning's tactics", the Coon Rapids *Enterprise* declared. "Are we going to be subjected to this Brookhart affliction, after such a hard winter?" queried the *Manchester Press*.

The opinion of the *Rolfe Arrow* was endorsed by many papers and reflected in the final vote. "If Iowa wants a Republican standpat senator", the editor announced, "Dickinson is as good as any one." Dickinson won all but twelve of the ninety-nine counties!

The Republican campaign for Governor ended in victory for George A. Wilson of Des Moines over John M. Grimes of Osceola and George R. Call of Sioux City. Wilson won almost two-thirds of the Iowa counties.

While the Republicans had cast almost twice as many votes as the Democrats, the Republican primary vote was 80,000 less than in 1934. The Democrats, however, retained their maximum primary strength. Candidates in the primaries spent \$71,093.84 in their campaigns, ranging from three cents by State Representative J. W. Frizzell of

Brooklyn to \$4,649.08 by Senator Dickinson. Ninety-one candidates failed to file their report of expenses within the legal time.

Seasoned political observers, according to C. C. Clifton, were happy over the nominations because the "most aggressive" candidates had been nominated for major offices. It was generally conceded that the defeat of Dickinson or Herring would have been a severe blow to either party. A cynical view of the nominations, however, was expressed by the *Lakota Record*. "In looking over the results of the recent primary election in this highly touted state of Iowa, one can easily surmise that there is still an ample smattering of first class dumbbells masquerading as perfectly normal citizens. They hurry into the polling booths, chalk up votes for the first names on the ballots and hurry off to their fumadiddling, smugly certain that they have done their duty."

With the primaries out of the way both parties planned their State conventions. The Republicans met at Des Moines on July 10th. Square-jawed Berry F. Halden of Chariton was keynoter and set the tempo of the convention when he shouted, "There will be no pussyfooting. We shall not hide in the storm cellar to escape the big wind that blusters out of the egotistic citadel on the Potomac." The representatives of "a typical prairie

State" pledged support to the constitution and the Supreme Court, urged "disclosure of graft and corruption in high places", favored social security, demanded administration of relief by local authorities, denounced reckless extravagance, deplored a sales tax, endorsed the 1936 national Republican agricultural plank, pledged support of farm-to-market roads, proposed to foster Iowa industry, and commended the "homely virtues of initiative, courage, industry and thrift exemplified" by their presidential nominee.

The Democrats assembled in Des Moines on July 23rd. As keynoter of the convention Lieutenant Governor Kraschel fired the opening blast at the opposing party. "If the Republicans of Iowa wish to destroy themselves by fighting the farmers' program, it is their privilege", he roared. "Hoover, Landon, Hearst, the Liberty League, Spangler, Dickinson, and Wilson have at no time been an inspiration for those hard-pressed citizens who have been victimized and enslaved by the reactionary program of greed." The party platform commended the Herring administration and pledged "continued co-operation" with Roosevelt and his New Deal.

At their State convention the Democrats chose John H. Mitchell of Fort Dodge to oppose Republican Harold E. Davidson of Clarinda for the of-

office of Attorney General. The tragic death of Senator Louis Murphy left his post open at Washington and Guy M. Gillette of Cherokee was nominated to fill the unexpired term. A little later the Republicans called a special convention to nominate Berry F. Halden to oppose Gillette.

Meanwhile, the weather became an issue in the political campaign. "Up to date", said the *Sac City Sun* sarcastically, "the governor has not claimed credit for the fine rains we have been having, but the campaign is young." The *Bellevue Herald* thought it would be interesting "to note what effect the great drought in the corn and grain belt will have on the coming national election." The *Knoxville Express* introduced a new plank for politicians to run on: "Any legislative candidate who will pledge himself to introduce and work for a law limiting summer temperature to 80 degrees and winter temperature to 0 will get a lot of support from people who are tired of talk and want something done."

That Iowa was regarded as a pivotal State in the presidential campaign is attested by the efforts of both parties to win the eleven Hawkeye electors. Roosevelt crossed Iowa from Burlington to Council Bluffs, making sixteen stops in Iowa. In three trips during August and September Landon made a score of stops. His running mate, Colonel

Frank Knox, spoke at Red Oak and Ottumwa, besides making rear-platform addresses at six other cities. Probably the most dramatic incident of the whole campaign was the meeting of Roosevelt and Landon at the capitol in Des Moines during the drought conference. William Lemke, leader of the Farmer-Labor party, also came to Iowa. James W. Ford, negro candidate for Vice President on the Communist ticket, just missed having a rendezvous with Father Coughlin who assailed Roosevelt's "broken promises" and his association with "Communist lovers" in a speech at Des Moines in September.

Roosevelt's victory was overwhelming, and his popularity contributed much to the success of the Iowa Democratic candidates for the Senate. Voting was heavy. In Iowa 1,142,737 ballots were cast for President, which was approximately seventy-seven per cent of the total number of qualified voters. Iowa was one of the few States in which the Republican vote was larger in 1936 than in 1932. President Roosevelt also gained, but proportionately less than his opponent.

In general, however, the electorate was not as generous with the Democrats as in 1932. The Republicans succeeded in electing four Representatives in Congress. They gained a majority in the State Senate and won sufficient strength in the

House to tie the hitherto Democratic majority. Furthermore, although the Democrats won all the State executive offices, many members of the party cast their votes for the Republican gubernatorial candidate. Kraschel in a total of over one million votes had a plurality of only 2431.

The 1936 political campaign was by far the costliest of any in Iowa history. Fully \$400,000 was spent by the political parties. Candidates contributed about one-fourth of this sum, which was about fifty per cent higher than usual. State central committees were lavish — the Republican expenditure being \$66,000, or nearly three times as much as in the 1932 campaign. Contributions totalling \$10,000 from the du Pont family of Delaware and \$3,500 from Alfred Sloan, Jr., were calculated to make Iowa safe for the Liberty League.

After the "tidal wave that gave the New Dealers the most sweeping victory ever won", the *Decorah Public Opinion* claimed it was "still a Republican paper — but very still." There was no comfort for the *Manchester Press*. "Never, at the lowest ebb of her fortunes, has this state fallen to such depths of ignominy and disrepute. It is the crowning infamy of a disaster which spreads from sea to sea, a sad commentary upon popular discrimination and loyalty to good government." The *Marshalltown Times-Republican* observed

that "those who opposed the presidential succession and the policies of his administration are of the same mind as when the battle was on. Neither success nor failure change established and fundamental convictions."

The Democrats viewed the future through rose-colored glasses. "Iowa farmers", observed the *Iowa Falls Citizen*, "have declared themselves in no uncertain terms as being in favor of an agricultural program which comes close to home." The *Sigourney News* felt there was no question but that the people "enjoyed their 'New Deal' and want some more of it." Jubilantly the *Ringsted Dispatch* prophesied, "We can now look to even bigger things in the way of agriculture for our state with two senators who are truly Iowans." The *Fort Dodge Messenger* expressed the principle that must prevail in a democracy: "The plain truth is that the overwhelming majority of Americans in virtually all sections have given the Roosevelt administration a tremendous endorsement. And we live in a country where the majority is king. All Americans are going to accept the verdict in the true American spirit. Republicans will wholeheartedly endorse the sentiments expressed by Governor Landon in his congratulatory telegram to President Roosevelt."

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN