

FUTURE OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

New National Chairman Discusses League of Nations and Labor Question as Possible Issues
—Dismisses Defeat Last November as Temporary "Reaction"

BACK in the days when party consciousness ran more strongly, so that in some parts of the country not only a political but also a social chasm divided Republicans and Democrats, a father who proudly styled himself a Lincoln Republican was watching the budding interests of his young son. The boy showed a precocious and remarkable zest in political discussion which immensely delighted the father. Then a turn the boy's conversation began to take disquieted the stanch republicanism of the parent.

"I'll be blamed," he said to his wife one day, "if I don't believe that boy is going to be a Democrat!"

The prediction came true. "That boy" is Homer S. Cummings, the new Chairman of the Democratic National Committee, whose one object now is to marshal the forces of the Democrats as to bring defeat, as overwhelming as possible, on the forces of the Republicans under the command of Will S. Hays, Chairman of the Republican National Committee.

A wide gap separates the viewpoints of the two leaders, naturally, but on one thing they are a unit. When Mr. Hays received his Chairmanship one of his first utterances was:

"I think every one should take an interest in politics."

That was one of the first statements made by Mr. Cummings in Washington the other day when sought for an interview.

"A man who does not take part," he went on in his decisive style of talking, and swinging away from his desk as if aggressively to emphasize what was coming, "has no right to criticize. He is but a bystander, not a citizen in the true sense, unless he takes an active part. We have had too many bystanders in late years, but I think we are now entering a period of great political vigor. The war has stirred the people and brings new issues. Thousands through the war have been brought in close contact with the Government and realize what good government is—and the effort required to attain it—as never before.

"Take, as a leading illustration, the great number of business men who were summoned to Washington during the war; they go back home with a quickened sense of their duty to participate in politics as the means of attaining increased efficiency in the Government. I hope to see our political life become as active as we imagine it was in the days of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, when political discussion was the absorbing topic, and a political speaking would draw as large a crowd as a ball game does now."

Here Mr. Cummings explained the manner of his entrance into the Democratic Chairmanship. While of practical experience in all sides of politics, the speaking side has most appealed to him. He was Chairman of the Speakers' Bureau of the Democratic Party in the campaigns of 1903, 1912, and 1916, and even before that his faith in oratory as a political weapon had displayed itself. In the first debate arranged between Yale and Harvard he was one of the representatives of Yale; in later years when, having achieved prominence as a member of the New England bar, he ran for the United States Senate in Connecticut, he set out determined to induce his Republican opponent to agree to a series of debates; that was his idea of getting the issues before the people—face to face, blow for blow. The Republican standard bearer shied; it seemed an antiquated way of conducting a political campaign; but Mr. Cummings persisted, and succeeded.

"What will be the main issues in the

1920 campaign?" was the next question asked.

"That is a hard one to answer," he said, and paused. Any thoughtful person in Washington at this time would hesitate at that question. The League of Nations issue has unsettled political conditions as they have not been unsettled in many years—probably not since those long-ago days when in the clash of new issues the old Whig Party went down and out and a new one, the Republican, came into being. When the League of Nations was brought concretely before the American people by the announcement of the proposed constitution, the first speakers, Senators Borah and Poindexter, Republicans, and Senator Reed, Democrat, took positions flatly in opposition. But later, speakers in the Senate, Senator Owen, Democrat, and Senators Lodge and Knox, Republicans, have based their criticism on calls for changes in the proposed constitution, thereby implying support of the main idea of a League of Nations.

One leading Senator, who declared himself as fundamentally opposed to the constitution of the League, has been quoted as saying that there was evidence throughout the country that a demand for a new party was widespread, and that, if both the old parties indorsed the proposition "of entangling alliances in European affairs, there would be a new party which would represent American principles and American institutions." Certainly many new issues group around the League of Nations, and the first question is whether the combined opposition to it will be large enough to make a considerable split anywhere.

"Will the League of Nations be the leading issue?" Mr. Cummings was asked as a more definite question than that preceding.

"That depends upon the attitude the Republican Party takes on it," he said. "I have been an advocate of the League for many years, long before the war began. I think it is the greatest thing in the world today—the most important. It is inconceivable that anybody who is familiar with the real conditions in Europe can think that there is any chance for permanent peace without a League of Nations. It is idle to talk of merely concluding a paper peace and then letting the world drift again.

"If this world war taught us anything, it is that, if one great nation gets into war with another, other great nations are drawn into it also. I would be much distressed to see this great idea made the subject of partisan appeal, for it is bigger than any party—too important to the world to be treated as a mere party issue. If I have anything to say as to the course of the Democratic organization, the League of Nations will be treated as a nonpartisan question, as nonpolitical, and will be discussed on the basis of what is best for America.

"I don't know what plans the Republicans have. It is largely up to the Republican Party to determine whether it

is big enough to treat this question in the same way. If the leaders are inclined to follow Taft, as some of them undoubtedly are, the League will be adopted and the question settled, and there is no reason why it should be a political issue in 1920. Unfortunately, some Republican leaders are so partisan in speech, so bitter and rancorous in judgment as to anything the President proposes, that they may mislead the Republican Party. In that event it might become the crucial political issue. If it does I have no doubt that the affirmative side will receive the overwhelming support of the American people. At the recent meeting of the Democratic National Committee, the members reported without exception that the people in the States which they respectively represented were overwhelmingly in favor of the League regardless of political lines."

"Then you do not apprehend that, if both the old parties stand for the general idea of the League, there is enough opposition to constitute a third party movement?" Mr. Cummings was asked.

"I have heard talk of a third party ever since I went into politics," answered the new Chairman, (and that goes back a good while, for he has been the Connecticut member of the Democratic National Committee for nineteen years, though he is still a comparatively young man, born in 1870,) "but," he continued, "the movements of this kind that have taken place have usually been short-lived. Support is not usually strong enough to change the current of events and the interpretation of them as represented by the Democratic and Republican Parties. I doubt if there can be organized under any respectable leadership a third party opposed to a League of Nations. If the League is adopted it will not be the crucial issue; if not, it will go to the people in the next Presidential campaign as the crucial issue."

"In the event that the League is adopted before the next campaign what do you think will be the main issue?"

"Our country must work out an adjustment between labor and capital which shall be so equitable and so effective that it will prevent recurring widespread labor disturbances. That is a most difficult and intricate problem; the best brains of the country must be used to find a solution. We may be sure that such attempts will be made, and it is highly probable that each party will take a distinct position on this question. If so, that issue will be a crucial one.

"But in my opinion it will be around the record of the Democratic Party that the active issues of the 1920 campaign will collect. That record, I think, will be our strongest asset. We have a record of domestic progress unparalleled in a like period of time. The mere statement of what was done shows an extraordinary advance. We have endeavored to interpret and make effective the best sentiment of the people. But for the leadership of Wilson we would have been without a proper currency system

in the gravest crisis we have ever gone through. In other words, but for the President and the Democratic Party we could never have gone through the war and financed ourselves and supplied the money needs of our allies without a great and devastating panic. The Republican Party showed itself impotent to revise the currency system. The Federal Reserve act is a wonderful achievement.

"Other important constructive legislation to our credit is the Farm Loan act, the creation of the War Finance Corporation, the establishment of a department under the Alien Property Custodian, the creation of the War Finance Board, the War Risk Insurance system for our soldiers and sailors, the Federal Trade Commission, the Ship Purchase act, the merchant marine shipbuilding law, the taking over of the railroads at a crucial period and their centralized control, the Smith-Lever act, the legislation for vocational education, the humanitarian legislation in behalf of women workers and children.

"In the conduct of the war the great fact is that it was successfully terminated under the leadership of the President. Petty criticisms of individual defects and of individual officials may attract attention for awhile, but ultimately the big things are the ones that count. The Republican Party will have great difficulty in proposing any alternative program which will be attractive. I predict they will fritter away their time and energies in futile criticism of things other men have done, and now that they have control of Congress will demonstrate their inability to carry on any reconstruction policies in a comprehensive and satisfactory sense."

"If you feel confident of indorsement by the people in 1920, how do you account for the defeat of the Democrats last November?"

"No friend of the Administration is at all disturbed by the results of the last election. It is a commonplace observation that if any progressive program has been steadfastly maintained for a certain period of time there is likely to be a moment of reaction. You cannot effect reform without changing conditions, and you cannot change conditions without producing some irritation, and if continued long enough, the irritation will make itself felt before the readjustment is completed."

In any event of political upheavals and changing party demarkations the new Chairman is serenely confident that the Democratic Party as a party is safe. "The Democratic Party," he said, "represents the stable and ultimately reliable forces in America. It has no common ground with the extreme reactionary devoted to selfish interests on one side and the extreme radical on the other who seek to disorganize society. The Democratic Party is therefore the most vital and promising force in this country. Upon the success of this party domestic peace and the internal progress depend. It is not safe for the average American to trust either the reactionary element of the Republican Party or the extreme anti-American elements which tend to disorganize society. The middle course is the safe course, and means a fair chance to all. If the reactionary elements obtain control, and they will undoubtedly make a desperate effort to do so at the next election, using unlimited financial resources to that end, then the dissatisfaction that would ensue would afford the greatest opportunity for the Bolsheviki, the I. W. W., and the like. Thus out of one extreme would spring the danger of another that would menace all that we value most in our institutions."



Harris & Ewing.
Homer S. Cummings, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee.