

Harding and the Front Porch Plot

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New York Times (1857-1922); Jul 18, 1920; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times

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THAT Senator Harding is now sitting on his front porch at Marion, Ohio, waiting to receive visitors singly or in delegations is no such spontaneous happy-thought as the innocent bystander might imagine. That he should do so was decided for him the night before his nomination. Mr. Harding was sent for and was about the fact that he was going to be nominated and was to stay on his front porch. Later the Senator announced that he had decided on this, but the decision was made in Chicago by Senators Lodge, Wadsworth, Brandegee, Calder, Smoot and Watson, with the humorous assent of Senator McCormick and without any unavailing protest by Senator Borah, who had done enough protesting.

At that conference, which broke up about 3 o'clock on the morning of the Saturday which was to see Harding nominated, the plan of campaign was sketched out. Senator McCormick was able, or thought he was able, to assure his fellow-Senators that the Progressives would stand for Harding if he was nominated, though McCormick was very far from being a Harding man. It was decided to break away altogether from the Roosevelt tradition and even from the Taft tradition, if there is such a thing, and bid for conservative support by going back to the McKinley tradition. It was decided, as one of the Senatorial conferees put it, to "dress up Harding in McKinley's clothes."

It was a bold decision, and while it really jumped with the personal preferences of nearly all the Senators at the conference it was based on a cool calculation of the chances. They believed that the country was tired not only of radicalism but of strikes, and that for all the votes they would lose by such a nomination and such a campaign they would gain an equal number. Most of them thought they would gain more.

Once they had decided to nominate Harding the important question remaining was that of the kind of campaign for him to make. There was no use in picturing him to the country as a progressive or a second Roosevelt—that was their decision, not Harding's, but Harding acquiesced in it. His own idea, before he was decided upon as the candidate, had been somewhat different. He had tried, in an awkward way, to conciliate the Roosevelt men; he had dug up what evidence he could that Roosevelt was not unfriendly to him. Of course he had not appeared personally in these unconvincing defenses, which were dropped when it was found that the Roosevelt men were not interested in them.

There was nothing about Harding that suggested Roosevelt or even Taft. He was in complete contrast to Wilson, on whose record the Republican fight was to be made. There was no use, the Senators decided, in making any pretenses. It was a better political move to be frank than to try to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. Therefore, the thing to do was to hark back to 1896 and to treat the years from 1901 to 1920 as an interlude in the history of the Republican Party—all this, of course, without doing or saying anything that could be offensive to the Progressives. The party breach was to be healed by silence. McCormick thought it could be done, or at any rate he said so. Borah was not so sure, but then Borah was only in the conference as the representative of Hiram Johnson and was limited to questions affecting Johnson's candidacy and attitude.

McCormick was right enough so far as the attitude of the leading Progressives, who are now back in the Republican Party is concerned. Aside from Lowden it is hard to think of any nomination that would be less likely to please them than that of Harding, but they have generally given in their assurances of support and have made at least as

good an appearance of liking it as their dead leader himself made in the case of Mr. Hughes after that candidate had disappointed the Colonel by his speech of acceptance. When you find even William Allen White acquiescing in the nomination, the same White who gave notice in 1916 that he would support the ticket till November and then open fire on it, it looks as if the old Progressive leaders were all heartily sick of being out of the party and willing to stand for anything.

But whether they can deliver their following or not is another question. And even in what I have said about

him. They reminded me of nothing in politics since the days of Henry George, and they were following Johnson much in the same spirit that George's disciples followed him. When, at that conference which really nominated Harding, the Senators asked Borah if Johnson would deliver his following to Senator Knox, since he could not be nominated himself, the answer was "No." At the time I thought it was a pig-headed and selfish attitude for Johnson to take. Later, thinking over the character of that following, I have not been so sure. Is it possible that he refused to deliver his dele-

erally doing everything possible to bring about a condition of hate, confusion and suspicion among all classes and kinds of Americans.

In McKinley's day, so the argument ran, people were good-natured. They may not have been so keen on civic righteousness and reforming their neighbors, but didn't they get along pretty well? Are not the people tired enough of the universal gloom and discontent to be willing to hark back to a day when folks were fairly happy, at least as much so as they can expect to be in a world not the best possible? Let's nominate Harding and chance it; at the worst we can only lose the election, and that might happen with any candidate.

There was another point. The argument was sure to be raised against Harding that he was the Senate's candidate, or rather candidate of Congress; for, though a handful of Senators took the lead, the other members of the Senate and the members of the House heartily seconded them—a fact, by the way, which has not been sufficiently brought out, or even brought out at all so far as I know. Governor Beekman's dream of a combination between Representatives and Governors to check the power of the Senate in the convention remained a dream. He could not have got the Representatives to join in any such move, for as far as nominations went they were with the Senators; and after his opening blast he probably discovered the situation, for he subsided.

The Senatorial conference considered this point and how to meet it. Again they gave their decision on the side of boldness. Though probably nobody outside that conference knows all that went on or who dominated it, the audacity and downrightness of its decisions prove conclusively to my mind that it was dominated by Senator Lodge. Everything it did was foreign and abhorrent to the customary political mind, which seeks to please everybody by trimming. The Senatorial conference decided to meet this argument against Harding by putting it forward as an argument in his favor. That sounds just like Lodge and nobody else, not even Smoot.

Instead of waiting for the enemy to say that Harding was the product of a Senatorial caucus and that he himself was a member of the Senatorial ring and would follow slavishly the dictates of Congress, the Senators determined that the first word to be said in Harding's behalf should be that he would restore constitutional government by taking counsel of Congress and heeding it. They were not afraid to say that he would take counsel of the Senate. They did not believe that the word "Senator" had become a term of opprobrium, or that they had anything to fear from its use in connection with their candidate. Provided, however, as lawyers say, that the party met the issue with the utmost boldness and frankness and throttled it at the beginning.

This was good politics. It did not wait for the charge to be met and dragged endlessly through the campaign. It met the charge in June, not in October. A charge met and faced so early in the fight will ordinarily lose all its potency before the campaign is half over. Lodge knew that, and there was not a Senator at that conference so inexperienced in politics as not to feel the force of it the moment it was put in words.

Again this fitted in with the McKinley tradition. McKinley not only consulted Congress, but did pretty much what it wanted. Harding's position, taken from the outset of the campaign, is that he will be merely President of the United States and nothing more; that the Constitution made Congress the legislative branch of a tripartite Government, and that the President is only the head of the executive—the Chief Executive. As the campaign goes on you will hear more from Harding along that line.

Still another consideration. The moment the idea of the "second McKinley" was sprung on the public it was sure to meet with objections, if not with sneers. The halo which the Buffalo murder placed around McKinley's brows has faded and his stature has lessened. Democrats and dissatisfied Republicans were sure to say that McKinley was a weak man, or at the best was only an average President, and to ask derisively, "Is that the best you can offer us?"

This, too, was met with boldness. In putting Harding forward as a second McKinley the Senatorial managers of his progress did not, and do not now, portray McKinley as a great man. That is the way they pictured him in his lifetime, when he was nicknamed "the second Napoleon," but it would not go down now. "Yes," they say, and said before the opposition had had time to utter the sneer, "McKinley was not a great man. Neither is Harding. But aren't you, the people, getting tired of great men? Wouldn't you like to rest up a bit with Dobbin after riding at breakneck speed for nineteen years on Salvatore and behind Maud S?"

To show how far the Senatorial conferees went with their plans, it is enough to say that at that very conference such a detail was decided upon as the front porch campaign, a thing which one might imagine could easily be left till some other time when they were not all tired out with days and nights of strenuous work. There was no reason why Harding should fear a speechmaking campaign. He is a pleasing speaker, with a fine appearance, although his voice has the tendency, noticeable in even such a consummate stump-speaker as the late Ollie James, to give out after a fair amount of use. But Presidential candidates nowadays carry throat specialists along, and even Mr. Taft was able to get through a whole campaign by proper care on the part of his managers.

But the determination to have Harding make a front porch campaign was deliberate and calculated. It was made because that kind of campaign would continually suggest McKinley. It was not because front porch campaigning is necessarily better than stump speaking. It was to emphasize as sharply as possible the break with the recent past and the return to the past of McKinley's time. Incidentally it was to show the return to dignity, but that is only another way of saying a return to McKinley. If McKinley was nothing else he was dignity in person.

The hardihood of these decisions was all the greater because, in fact, Harding has no resemblance whatever to McKinley except in the fact that he is conservative and the fact that he can get along with Congress. McKinley was a bid stodgy. He was solemnly virtuous. I can never think of him except with his hand thrust in the breast of his frock coat, though I never saw him assume that pose. He never gave any indication that he possessed any sense of humor. He was always intellectually in a silk hat and a "Prince Albert." When he spoke he used the rising inflection at the end of his sentences. He was, one might say, always strong for the Good, the Beautiful and the True. He was a sincere man and a kindly gentleman, but plenty of people are that without being President of the United States. Something more is needed.

Harding is so nearly the opposite of McKinley in everything but the high standard of his personal life that it is hard to think of the two men in the same moment. He is a good, square man, lives cleanly, and loves the decent things. But he is full of fun and good-fellowship; he likes to go to church and he likes to play poker. Wherever human beings are gathered is the place where Harding likes to be. He likes the human race. He loves a joke and can make jokes. There is a kindly tolerance about his attitude toward

his fellow-men that is getting scarce in the America of 1920.

It goes deeper than that. Harding has a far keener mind than McKinley. He is quite capable of thinking his own thoughts. If, as President, he should let the Senate dictate to him about legislation, as he probably will, it will not be because he can't think except as the Senate wills. It will be because, by the cast of his mind, he is a partisan politician and a member of the machine, and because that is his idea of what a good party man should do. If anybody thinks this shows weakness of character let him take note of Governor Smith of New York, a machine man of the straitest sect, and yet one whom nobody would accuse of being weak. One thing reformers have

never been able to understand is that there is a cast of mind quite different from theirs, and that a man possessing it or possessed by it may be just as sincere in standing by the machine as they are in opposing it. That is one reason why they have such uphill work in reforming their neighbors.

Harding is as quick in thought as McKinley was slow. He has personal magnetism, which McKinley had not. He can be dignified without being solemn. He is, in fact, dignified with an unconscious dignity. The thing was not a pose with McKinley, but McKinley's dignity was just the kind that a man desiring to pose would adopt. His dignity was oppressive to some people, at least; but Harding wears his dignity as naturally as he

wears his clothes. He does not lose an atom of it even when he walks into the composing room of The Marion Star in his shirt-sleeves and borrows a chew of tobacco from the nearest compositor, who is always "Bill" or "Jim" to him. And he smokes cigarettes. That small fact tells a world of difference between him and McKinley.

It would be far from the truth to suppose that the Senatorial conferees were all of equal weight in the conference, but they all represented something substantial in the Senate and in politics. The unmistakable handwriting of Senator Lodge is legible on every decision they arrived at, and the form which each decision took was certainly his. Senator McCormick was filled with admiration for Lodge after that night's work, and though bound to secrecy about the deliberations of the conference he could not help letting some of his enthusiasm out. How many proposals were rejected and by what means of elimination and addition the conferees finally framed their program may never be known; but the completeness with which the scheme was worked out after one night's session by men physically exhausted shows a master mind, and the stamp of audacity which it bears is Lodge's own stamp.

Senator Smoot, of course, is only second to Lodge as a manager. Senator Watson is not only one of the inner ring of the Senate, but is probably the best like man in the whole outfit, as he deserves to be. Probably if the Senators had consulted nothing but their own likes and dislikes they would have thrown the nomination to him. As for Wadsworth and Brandegee, they were there because they are a part of the board of control, and Wadsworth and Calder represented the voting strength of New York.

The list is one of conservatives. Borah was present, but, as I have said before, only in the capacity of counsel for Senator Johnson. He was defiant and positive. Except by courtesy, he had no voice in anything except the considerations relating to the Johnson candidacy, then recognized as on its last legs.

There was nothing spontaneous or accidental about this conference. It had been planned as long ago as last Winter. It was then decided by the Senatorial machine to obtain the election of enough un instructed delegates to control the convention, to let the balloting proceed until enough had developed to show who could or could not be an acceptable candidate, and then to meet and form a decision not only about the candidate, but about the plan of campaign.

Harry M. Daugherty, Senator Harding's manager, was so sure of the result that he made a prediction about it long before the convention met. He predicted that as soon as the delegates got tired of the dead lock, and there was sure to be one, fifteen men would sit around a table and pick the nominee, and it would be Harding. He was only a little out in his calculations about the number of men, and he was mistaken in thinking that he would be one of them, for when the time came the Senators sent for Harding himself, not Daugherty. Otherwise it was an accurate prophecy, even though it may have been based on nothing more than a knowledge of the Winter conference in Washington and a knowledge, which he shared with everybody else, that the Senate would like to nominate Harding if it dared.

It was that very question of during that was most discussed. It took some nerve to chance the possibility of a Progressive defection, and, what was worse, Harding's repeated failures in the primaries seemed to indicate a weakness even among regulars. The man in the street could not be very fond of him, or Harding would not have met with such a setback in his own State as he did in the primaries. But the Senatorial junta determined to meet both objections with clenched fists.

So that is why Harding is the nominee of the Republican Party, and it is the reason why he is front-porching in Marion.



Trying on McKinley's Coat.

the leaders it must be remembered that the Johnson element has made very little effort to convince Senator Harding and the National Committee that it cares much whether the ticket is elected or not. It is not true that Senator Johnson's following was wholly made up of "the lunatic fringe" of the old Progressive Party. There were a few men in it who had been close to Colonel Roosevelt and were as practical as he. There is not much doubt that if George W. Perkins had been in good health instead of in a dying condition he would have been one of them.

Senator Johnson himself could not deliver his following even if he were to make strenuous efforts to do so instead of being so slow of speech on the question. As for those who followed Wood, and who included most of Roosevelt's own intimates, there is nobody who can deliver them either, though Assemblyman Roosevelt, Mrs. Robinson, William Allen White, James R. Garfield and all the rest should undertake it. For whatever they may say in behalf of Harding, they cannot picture him as a Progressive, and if they did they would be going directly contrary to the whole Republican plan of campaign. They will have to make the same kind of straight Republican speeches that Senator Brandegee, for instance, will make.

That the Progressives are not as deliverable as the run of political people was borne in on me at Chicago when, day after day, I sat in Hiram Johnson's headquarters and watched the curious medley of men and women who kept streaming in there, delegation by delegation, to see him and tell him they were for

gates because he knew he could not deliver them?

Even the Colonel himself could not deliver anything like his whole following to Justice Hughes in 1916, though he certainly tried hard enough. What he could not do it is difficult to imagine lesser men doing. President Wilson was re-elected by Progressive votes. Many of those who voted for him remained in the Democratic Party, and Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby is one of them. It goes without saying that such men cannot be won back by the nomination of Harding; the point is only mentioned to show how undeliverable the Progressives were in 1916, when the Republican candidate was at least "liberal" though not radical.

There is no magic in McKinley's name to lure them back. The Senators who nominated Harding at that midnight conference did not expect there would be. The use of the name was decided upon not with any purpose to offend Progressives but with the design of attracting men less interested in politics than in being comfortable; men sick of turmoil. The name was restful in its significance. Everybody, in McKinley's day, was not busy devising outlaw strikes, running strikers out of town, breaking up meetings, passing prohibition laws, abolishing horse races, starting endless "drives," patching up the Constitution, bringing over funny-sounding foreign words like "sabotage," interfering with business, hanging I. W. W. agitators from bridges, fomenting race-riots, quarrelling with each other over what particular kind of offenders should be deported and gen-