

Harding's Death Precipitates Decisive Political Struggles

By JAY LOVESTONE

1924 Biggest Year in American Politics

Most political observers and students of Governmental problems are convinced that 1924 will be the biggest year in American politics. The struggle between the various groups in the Republican Party was going on apace even before Harding's death. Month by month the insurgents and Progressives in the Republican fold were drawing nearer and nearer to developing an organization separate from the G. O. P. This tendency was particularly accentuated by the increasingly distressing conditions of the farmers.

So rapidly were the Progressives increasing their Congressional strength and popular influence that many standpatters, high in the ranks of the Republican machine, like Senator Moses, threw up the political sponge and openly admitted disaster ahead. So vague and confusing did the situation become and so close did the strength of the opposing forces in the coming Sixty-Eighth Congress appear, that a Western Senator told the writer: "The next Congress will be so sharply divided that it will be unable to agree on passing even the Ten Commandments in six months."

But all were agreed that the big issues would be settled only at the conventions of the Democratic and Republican Parties. And despite numerous aspirants to the nomination for the Presidency on the Republican ticket, it was practically common knowledge among those who knew Washington that the Republican renomination of Harding was a foregone conclusion, much as many may not have wanted it for strategic and other reasons. It was obvious to all that if the Republican Party was to stand a chance at all in the 1924 Elections it could not do anything which might in the least give its opponents the slightest opportunity to say that it had repudiated its own administration. Of course the failure to give Harding a chance to succeed himself would have been seized upon by the Democrats and Progressives as the best proof of confessed bankruptcy on the part of the Old Guard in the Republican machine.

Harding's Death and the Republican Party

When the first word of Harding's illness reached Washington, those who were in the inner circle of the President were terrified. They knew and felt that there was little chance of his pulling thru under attack by heart disease, pneumonia, and ptomaine poison. The president was cautioned by many of his friends about his health before taking his last trip. But Harding felt that he had to make his grand tour in order to save the Republican Party from ruin and unite the discordant elements at the next convention.

Now that Harding is dead, the Republican Party is confronted with confusion worse confounded. The removal of Harding by death has opened the floodgates of political ambition and conflict inside the Party. There is no leader of any group in the G. O. P. who could serve to unify the Party as well as Harding holding the office of Presidency for four years could. Now every leader and near-leader of the Party is ready to come forward with a proposal that he be made the Moses to lead the Republicans out of the political desert.

The spirit of progressivism which had been stifled by the war is again coming to the front. The skepticism that the War had brought to the great flock of American Liberals and Progressives is rapidly on the wane. The swift and steady disappearance of the recent prosperity spurt, the increasingly heavy oppressive hand of the Government on the workers struggling for even the most elementary needs of life, the persistently accelerating pace at which farmers have been drifting to bankruptcy and economic and social helplessness have all served to give widespread strength to the militant spirit among the workers and the revolt of the farmers against an Administration which they helped to sweep in by the greatest majority ever accorded a Presidential nominee in American history. The insurgent movement against the Republican Party had gained so much strength that its 1920 majority of seven millions was turned into a minus quantity on the basis of the election results since the late Presidential campaign.

It is under this condition of country wide dissatisfaction, with depression staring the country in the face, and acute dissension in its own ranks that the Republican Party is going before the country to seek another four-year lease on the Governmental machinery of the country.

Speculation as to who will receive the Republican nomination is now rife. Some expect Coolidge who is a dyed-in-the-wool reactionary bloodhound and labor-hater to use the coming months prior to the Convention for building up a machine of his own to secure his nomination. Others believe that some one in Harding's Cabinet who is known to favor the former President's policies will be put forward.

But no matter who will be nominated, it is clear to all that pandemonium will reign supreme at the next Republican Convention. In the welter of conflicting economic and social forces the Republican machine that had been swept into power only a few years ago will be challenged more dangerously than ever. There are two most probable steps that the Convention will take. The likelihood of both these has been precipitated by the removal of Harding from the scene of conflict. The first and most likely outcome of the Convention will be the nomination of a completely

The Strike-Breaker Who Is President



CALVIN COOLIDGE

reactionary ticket with an open declaration of war against all forces of Progressivism and near-Progressivism. Should, however, some dark horse appear on the political horizon and win a compromise nomination for the Presidency, then some wishy-washy Progressive phrase-monger like Kenyon will be given the Vice-Presidential nomination in order to rally the LaFollette forces to the Republican banner.

What Are the Progressives Going to Do?

The strategy of the Progressives has been to pursue a policy of watchful waiting. La Follette's strategy has been to let the Reactionaries take the first step. But the election of Magnus Johnson has served as a steel rod to the followers of La Follette. Harding's death will undoubtedly embolden the insurgents and make them increase their demands on the Republican Party manifold.

What the Democrats Are Up To

The Democrats do not see that they have gained any political advantage by the exit of Harding from the coming campaign. Many of them believed that Harding was easy picking. They felt that the Republican Party could not get a weaker opponent for them and yet that the Republican Party had to put him in the field. The strategy of the Democratic machine has been to put forward some fake Progressive Democrat as Presidential nominee, get a middle of the road program, and point out to the country how unfit to run the Government both the Reactionary and Progressive Republicans are. The last point they would prove by the confusion and do-nothing record of the Sixty-Eighth Congress which would be unable to get sufficient agreement to pass any important legislation at a time when there was great popular pressure for remedial measures.

With Harding out of the way the Democrats do not feel themselves confronted with as easy a task as before. Should an outright reactionary be nominated by the Republicans the likelihood of the Progressives following the Democratic Party are now more slim than before Harding's death. And if a Kenyon-compromise is reached by the Republicans the Democrats will surely be up against it in smacking the reactionary label all over the Republican Party. Their middle of the road policy will thus be not as effective as it would have been had Harding remained to face their attacks. The Republican crimes of the past will not be so available for political target practice in the present.

Conclusion

The death of Harding has only precipitated the moments of decision in the giant battles that are to be fought in the coming political struggles culminating in the 1924 campaign. The reactionaries as well as the progressives are now more than ever bent on going all the way down the line and fighting it out.

Finally, in the ascent of Coolidge to the Presidency there is a certain amount of historical justice. Coolidge is an open enemy of Labor. He has not hidden his hatred of the working masses even behind a political smile. He got where he is today on the basis of a strikebreaking record in Massachusetts. The Harding Administration has been the blackest in years as far as the Labor Movement is concerned. It is historically symbolic of the impending class conflicts that a strikebreaking Administration like Harding's should close with so notorious and open a strikebreaker as Coolidge at the helm of the Government.