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Disastrous Democratic Convention of 1924 I

Lead: With the possibility of returning to power clearly at hand, the Democratic Party in 1924 went to New York City to pick a Presidential nominee. In 14 hot muggy summer days the Democrats nearly committed suicide.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The peculiar election system of the United States requires a Presidential candidate to assemble a majority of votes in the Electoral College. This is one of the most

important reasons why a huge and diverse society such as the United States has only two major political parties. Instead of a splintered system with dozens of small parties such as in many European nations, the system is prejudiced toward two broadly based, umbrella-like parties that force political groups to work together to achieve that magic number in the electoral college. This tendency is also reflected in state and local elections.

Perhaps no political party in U.S. history has demonstrated this centralizing inclination as has the Democratic Party. Since it was established by the political groups allied with Thomas Jefferson in the early 1800s, the Democrats have

welcomed or squeezed under their crowded tent wealthy industrialists, bankers, immigrant groups, slave owners, ex-slaves, abolitionists, prohibitionists, wets, drys, farmers, intellectuals, fundamentalists, liberals, conservatives, free-traders, protectionists, pro-life, pro-choice, and so on. Every four years this political menagerie gets together for a big family gathering and proceeds to tear itself apart. Whereupon, the Party would go out, surprise all observers and win elections, lots of them. Over the years American voters have seemed to find a certain amount of charm in all that anarchy. At least it was entertaining, yet sometimes the Party went too far. Such was the case in 1924 when the Democrats descended

on Madison Square Garden in New York and nearly destroyed themselves. Next time: 103 ballots to nowhere.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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