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Disastrous Democratic Convention of 1924 II

Lead: The American humorist, Will Rogers, said "The Democrats are the only known race of people that give a dinner and fight over it. No job is ever too small for them to split over." He surely must have been speaking of the 1924 Party Convention in New York.

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

Content: By all rights the Democrats should have been hot prospects in the election of 1924. They had enjoyed impressive results in the congressional returns of 1922. The

Republicans had been scarred by the scandals of the Harding administration and had as their candidate the competent but dull and uninspiring President Calvin Coolidge.

When the Democrats descended on New York in late June, 1924, all the rich variety that went to make up the Party coalition crowded into the old Madison Square Garden and proceeded to tear itself apart. In the winter and spring, prominent politicians from several states declared themselves as favorite-son candidates and began to rip at each other with great bitterness. This left raw and exposed many of the vicious divisions within the Party.

The two leading candidates represented the potential for disaster if the delegates could not get together. Former Treasury Secretary William Gibbs McAdoo of California drew most of his support from the South and West where the Ku Klux Klan was then enjoying one of its periods of resurgence. He was Protestant, farm-oriented and favored Prohibition. Across the way was Al Smith of New York, an urban Catholic who hated the Klan and favored the repeal of Prohibition.

As the voting proceeded, it was clear neither could achieve the necessary two-thirds of the votes to win but both, feeling it a matter of honor, stayed in. 103 ballots later the

Party dumped them all and nominated Ambassador John W. Davis of West Virginia, but it was too late. The Democrats were crushed in November and did not recover until in the depths of the Depression they ran with Franklin Roosevelt.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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