

DIRECT PRIMARY FOE OF THE OLD MACHINES

By FREDERIC J. HASKIN.
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 Washington, D. C., June 26.—
 With the Republican convention just behind, and the Democratic convention just before them, the American people are greatly exercised at this time about the whys and hows of "getting the nomination." So far as national politics is concerned, one might search the constitution and the laws forever and never find one word to authorize a political convention, or to give power to a convention's mandate. Yet a vast number of the voters of the United States place the action of the convention above their own convictions and vote for the nominee regardless of personal preferences. And the members of the electoral college—none has ever disobeyed the command of his party convention.

Political party nominations are necessary to the career of the American statesman. No man is so great that he can enter public life without the aid of a nomination to help him to office, or the capacity to control nominations to help others to office. The infrequent success of independent candidates for minor offices mark the exception which but proves the rule. Therefore, it is important that the whole fabric of our political institutions rest upon the political party nomination. The voters can choose no better man for president than is nominated by the parties. The so-called independent voter can never select a man to take his choice by bartering a promise of the "independent" vote, but under ordinary circumstances it must take what the parties give it; the greater of two goods, or the least of two evils.

Nominating Machinery.
 Just at this time it is interesting to mark the progress of the nominating machinery of the American political parties. In the beginning of the party system, then came the delegated convention, and now the direct primary election. It is interesting to see the machinery to its most democratic extremity. There is great talk of conventions that are nominating a case like there has been such talk before; ever since conventions were held, in fact. The greater volume of complaint now is but the evidence of the increasing purpose of the people to take the power of nominating into their own hands.

Leaving aside the hosts of municipal, county, state and congressional offices, for which nomination is already made by direct primaries in many states, it is interesting to apply the theory of the direct primary to the nomination for the presidency, the most important function exercised by political party.

Select the Chief.
 The framers of the constitution did not believe the people possessed sufficient wisdom and judgment to select the chief executive of the federal government. They battled long over the proposition of leaving the selection to the national legislature, or of entrusting it to the several state legislatures. In the end, they left it to electors to be appointed by the various states—not by the people of the states—in such manner as each state legislature might direct.

The constitution was null and void from the very beginning, so far as the spirit of this provision was concerned. The people had every confidence in their ability to select a president, and they were very anxious to choose a president only those persons who would reflect the popular will. Thus the electoral college came to be merely an empty form, so far as the constitutional function of choosing a president is concerned. It is very far from being an empty form in that it provides a system which gives the smaller states more power in proportion to their population than would obtain in a direct vote; and thus makes the selection of a minority president possible.

Selecting Presidents.
 The fathers declined the proposition to vest the power of selecting a president in the hands of congress out of consideration for the integrity of the tripartite system of government they were establishing in which the checks and balances of the executive, judicial and legislative departments were so nicely adjusted. But congress soon perceived that the electoral college was amenable to the popular will. Therefore it set about to capture and command that will, thus virtually giving congress the power to name the president.

Political parties appeared in congress before lines were drawn among the people. The congressional caucus was the result. From 1788 until 1800 the presidents were named by informal party caucuses of members of congress. The attacks on "King Caucus" were begun in the public press as early as 1850, although the first formally invoked nominating caucus was not held until 1864. From that time until 1884 "King Caucus" ruled supreme, and the presidents were in fact chosen by the members of congress.

Congress and Politics.
 If that method of selecting party candidates for president had prevailed, it is a safe bet that the list of presidents from Monroe's time until now would not contain a single name which it now bears. Congress has always looked at things from a point of view quite different from that of the voter. It does not require great mental ability to imagine that the present Republican members of congress would not choose Mr. Taft, or that the Democrats in congress might prefer another than Mr. Bryan. Certain it is that no congressional caucus would have nominated Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln or Andrew Jackson.

It was the certainty that a caucus would not nominate Jackson that led to the establishment of the convention system by the overruling of "King Caucus." In 1823 the Tennessee legislature by an informal vote placed the name of Andrew Jackson in nomination for president. This established a precedent, and two years later the legislatures of various states by solemn and formal legislative enactment placed the names of their favorites in nomination for the chief magistracy.

When Jackson did become president he recognized the power of the political use of the patronage of the office. He used this power to bring a business to establish the convention system and to inaugurate present day political party methods. Ever since that time, his day has used the power of patronage for political purposes to an extent varying with the personal characteristics of the man in office and the necessities of the occasion.

Bryan are called the "bosses" of the two great parties. Yet a glance at the past will show that no party leader can control delegates at a national convention to go against the will of the masses of the party. A leader often can compel the delegates to go against their own will if he has the masses on his side.

What did the power of the administration amount to in the convention to nominate a candidate to succeed Arthur? It was used, but all in vain. Mr. Cleveland, like Mr. Roosevelt, had very pronounced ideas about the civil service and "harmful activity" in politics; but they did not prevent the power of the Cleveland office holders from being used in conventions. What did it amount to in Chicago in 1886 after Mr. Bryan brought in the cross of gold and the crown of thorns?

Good Old Days.
 There was a time when the national conventions met without anyone being able to forecast the outcome. There would be a dozen candidates to start with, and frequently a dark horse would

win. It was exciting, it was interesting, but it was not always for the best. The delegates had much more freedom than they have in these latter days. It is true but the very nature of a convention prevents true deliberation. Delegates left unhampered by instructions are apt to be swayed by the most artificial devices, they are very unlikely to consider the genuine needs of the party and country.

After a while the people began to object to the introduction of so many dark horses. Instructions to delegates became more frequently the expression of the opinion of the party in a state as to the relative merits of the leading aspirants; less frequently a compliment for a favorite son and a basis for trading and "dark horseing." The primary election has given the voters control of the nominations for smaller offices, and they are reaching out to control the greatest of them all. This is the reason the national conventions have become but ratification meetings which formally register the will of the party.

The tendency toward vesting more power in the primary means a great change in American politics. Until this time the greatest interest has been in taking sides with some aspirant and aiding him to work the machinery in the direction of getting the nomination. If the present tendencies are carried out, the interest in the future will be changed to the business of taking sides with some idea and aiding in the work of "making the nomination."

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