

WEST VIRGINIA IS IN DOUBT; HARDING HAS BEST CHANCE

By David Lawrence
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Wheeling, W. Va., Oct. 28.—West Virginia is being classed as doubtful largely because the situation here is puzzling and has most people guessing.

The basis on which the Democrats claim the state is superficially as plausible as the method of calculation of the Republicans. A three-cornered race for governor with a regular Republican and an Independent Republican and a Democrat has complicated matters. But the outstanding fact is that the situation, while not without anxiety to the Republicans, is nevertheless such that Senator Harding may be expected to win the state's electoral vote. Democrats will dispute this and point to the trend which has started in toward Cox on the League of Nations issue. They will also point confidently to the mining camps and argue that Cox is assured of the labor vote because of his well-known friendliness to the miners of Ohio.

NEGRO VOTE LARGE

On the other hand, it is well to examine the laboring vote in this state with relation to that very issue and see whether the miners will be guided by the views of their leaders or their own peculiar prejudices. Many miners are negroes. And in the Clarksburg-Farmington district the laboring class is largely foreign born. Of those who are naturalized, more than a third are Italians. I talked with one of the Italian leaders who knows more about Italian voters in this state than any of the politicians on either side. He himself had twice voted for Wilson. He launched into a severe denunciation of the president for having kept Plume from Italy.

FOREIGN VOTE DISGRUNTLED
"Every Italian will vote for Harding," he said. "I am doing everything in my power to double the vote of Harding among the Italians." There are many thousands of Italians among the mine workers. There are other nationalities, of course. The Italian grievance is merely an illustration. The truth is the miners are more conscious of nationality than class.

The prejudice on the Plume question is something concrete. The promise of help to the workers as a class is abstract.

So Governor Cox, who is personally popular in West Virginia, as is proved by the success of his meetings throughout the state both early in the campaign and this last week, cannot hope to get a decision on the merits of his own candidacy. The resentment against the acts of the Wilson administration is bound to be a vital factor in preventing such a group vote as that of labor from being cast solidly for Cox.

STRAW VOTE IS EVEN

One cannot dismiss West Virginia without recognizing the plausibility of the Democratic case. For example, the Rexall straw vote, which has been so overwhelmingly for Harding in most states, shows the two presidential candidates running more or less evenly. The

drugstore votes represent the city vote, which is normally Republican. If that is evenly divided, the Democrats contend that the votes in the mining district, where there have been few straw votes taken, will cast a large vote for Cox. Even assuming defection on the ground of alien grievances, Republicans will admit that such strength as Cox develops must come from the mining districts. Furthermore, the registration of white women is far in excess of negro women, a fact from which the Democrats insist on drawing optimistic conclusions.

Also, it will be recalled that Hughes carried West Virginia four years ago by about 2600 votes, which indicated a powerful Democratic vote in a state normally Republican by many thousands.

WOMEN INTERESTED IN LEAGUE

The women are showing a marked interest in the League of Nations as an issue. Both sides will admit that, while the state looked easy for Harding in August, something has happened to cause anxiety in the Republican camp. The Republicans, who are disposed to recognize a change in the situation here since August, blame the factional disturbances growing out of the primary race for governor. Samuel Montgomery, who is making the race as an independent or nonpartisan candidate, manages to draw from both the Cox and Harding camps. Although he himself says he favors Harding, there are plenty

of Montgomery and Cox clubs and banners in the political parades and demonstrations.

WILSON A FAVORITE

The Democrats explain the change of sentiment as a reaction against Senator Harding's speech at Des Moines on the League of Nations. Many of the Democrats are confident that if the election were two weeks or three weeks off there would be absolutely no question about the result. They feel that the swing is in their direction. One interesting thing which puzzles the political sharps is the spontaneous demonstrations for Woodrow Wilson which occur in the mass meetings held by the Democrats. One editor insisted that if Wilson had been

able to come to West Virginia and make a few speeches on the league the state would have been safely Democratic. That, however, is purely hypothetical. Summarizing the West Virginia situation, one goes away with an instinctive feeling that Senator Harding will win the state by a proportionately less vote than he will carry neighboring states like Ohio and with a readiness not to be surprised if Cox upsets all calculations and obtains the electoral vote by a bare majority. The state is doubtful, with Republican probabilities.

(Tomorrow's dispatch will be the first of a series of three analyzing the political situation throughout the whole country, based upon personal visits to almost every state in the Union since the two conventions.)

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Washington at
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