

Democrats' Platform Convention Reviewed

(Editor's note: The Democratic party of Oregon last week end held the first party convention in the state for about 50 years. The Mail Tribune asked one of the delegates, Marijane (Mrs. Robert) Duncan, to record her impressions of it. Her report, slightly edited, follows.)

By MARIJANE DUNCAN

We have had the unique and invigorating experience of attending, as delegates, the first Platform Convention of the Democratic party in Oregon.

The enthusiastic response given this innovation in Oregon politics by Democrats all over the state, the press, and the public, assures that it will become a traditional part of the program of our party.

There were eight elected delegates from Jackson county, and eight alternates. These were nominated and elected at a meeting of the Democratic Central Committee in December. Our county chairman, Frank Christian, and vice chairman, Edith Rode, were automatically delegates, as was State Representative Bob Duncan, speaker of the house of representatives.

A preliminary meeting was going on as we arrived Thursday, of the platform and resolutions committee, of which Bob was a member. All committee meetings during the convention were open to interested spectators, Democratic or not. No secret, smoke-filled rooms here!

10 a.m. Friday

Bright-eyed delegates gathered under their banners Jackson county was seated way down front. There were 12 of us the first morning.

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Frank and Phyllis Christian of Talent, Mark and Louise Norton of Phoenix, K. C. (Swede) Wernmark of Central Point, Larry Sheehan of Rogue River, Bruce Manley of Jacksonville; and from Medford, Edith Rode, Jo Hudson, Marie Bosworth, Bob, and myself. Delegate Donna Straus of Sams Valley arrived that afternoon.

Bob Duncan nominated Rep. Al Flegel of Douglas county as permanent chairman of the convention. Bob found this a privilege, for Al Flegel is not only a good and valuable legislator, but a good and valued friend. He was elected by acclamation.

Every county delegation had submitted dozens of resolutions, which had been sorted into several categories: education, taxation, agriculture, labor, economic development, civil rights, power, governmental re-organization, natural resources, health and welfare.

My committee was education, and we found we had over 80 resolutions to work over and consolidate for later presentation to the platform committee. (These were reduced to 19 in education committee and later reduced to seven by the platform committee.)

1:30 p.m. Friday

The delegates re-convened to hear the keynote address by Sen. Wayne Morse, who began with words of praise for the convention as an example of "grass roots democracy," and went on to criticize the present primary system, particularly presidential primaries which are held in only a few states and cannot, he said, be truly indicative of the nationwide strength of any candidate.

The senator urged the delegates to adhere to "Jeffersonian principles of democracy" in their platform, putting "human interests first, materialism second." He detailed his own thinking on some of the issues that would come before the convention and ended with a strong plea for a "people's foreign policy" which would bring international problems "under the canopy of the United Nations" and put an end to "dangerous

secret diplomacy."

2:30 p.m. Friday

Committees convened in separate rooms, and those who had not been assigned to committees stayed in the hall to hear short talks by several party leaders. Former State Chairman Howard Morgan suggested that thought be given to combining the open primary system with the convention system of nominating candidates, retaining the best features of each.

Sen. Monroe Sweetland spoke on the need for governmental re-organization in this state. Sen. Alfred Corbett of Portland outlined problems of the aged; and Speaker Bob Duncan summarized problems which would face the next Legislature and gave his ideas for meeting and solving them.

In the committee meetings ideas flew, with each section of the state contributing its viewpoint. Exchanges were sometimes heated on controversial issues such as basic school support, power development, trade with Red China, labor problems, and welfare policies.

Some committees finished by 5 p.m., others were still going at 7. The platform and resolutions committee, chaired by Kenneth Johnson, young newsman of Salem, and composed of 20 members representing every area of the state, was scheduled to meet at eight to begin the arduous task of writing the platform to be submitted to the whole convention in the morning.

8 p.m. Friday

The platform committee sat around the outside and inside of tables placed in a U-shape in a large basement room of the Marion. Spectators and reporters jammed the room from the time deliberations began until sometime after midnight. Then the crowd started to thin out. Your "reporter," however, stuck it out till after four, when the committee finally, and wearily, adjourned.

Each chairman presented his, or her, compilation of resolutions. These were read one at a time; then discussed, amended, tabled, or accepted. Some became part of the platform proper, others merely resolutions.

Upstairs, several stenographers and five delegates known as the "re-write" committee, labored to put the stuff sent up by the platform committee into acceptable form. Now and then one of these people would appear to urge both haste and economy — there were, they said, too many resolutions and too many words in those resolutions.

I was reminded of a session of the Legislature when people start asking each other — as they inevitably do — where on earth all these bills come from, why do we need so many changes in our laws and government? The answer is the same in both cases: different things are important to different people at different times. People from all over the state come together with their multiple and varied interests, desires, and needs. In the Legislature, this results in something like 1400 bills, of which a little over half are finally passed. In the convention, about the same percentage of resolutions came under the ax during that all-night session of the platform committee.

There were moments of fun, moments of tenseness and anger. At one point Rep. Barton was heard to remark that it seemed to him the committee was not only trying to re-write the 10 commandments, but the book of Leviticus as well: At another point, teacher members took umbrage at the over-enthusiastic efforts of someone to achieve the economy requested by the re-write committee by peremptorily tabling several of the resolutions on education.

When a resolution directing that 48 billions of trees be planted during the next decade was read, it was just too much for some members. One parsimonious soul suggested that the word "billions" be struck in the interests of practicality. Rep. Duncan offered a compromise: "Let's," he suggested, "just make it 'lots and lots' of trees. The chairman of the economic development committee, in some discomfort, hurried to explain that the "billions" should have been "millions" — but too late. The committee had decided to leave reforestation up to the gods, the squirrels, and the forestry department.

9 a.m. Saturday

Some of the late-working delegates were not so bright-eyed this morning, but nearly all of them were present. Chairman Flegel, who had given up and gone to bed around 2:30 a.m., was as ebullient as if he'd enjoyed the traditional eight hours. No time was wasted in getting to the business at hand; and there began a wonderful demonstration of democracy in action.

All over the large hall, under banners bearing those colorful, saga-provoking Oregon county names — Umatilla, Harney, Multnomah, Coos, Curry, Clackamas, Klamath — these people, the elected delegates of many other people — farmers, housewives, teachers, mill-workers, lawyers, lumbermen, businessmen, stenographers, carpenters . . . read and listened and discussed . . . jumped up to protest or suggest or amend . . . voted "aye," voted "no," voted separately, voted together.

All day long the process went on, as plank after plank was presented, debated, accepted, or rejected. At the end of the day a platform was written, a vast sigh of relief and satisfaction was sighed all over the hall, and the members of a great party were brought closer together in spirit and in purpose than they had ever been before in this state.

Certainly, not everyone got everything he or she wanted. Certainly, parts of the platform were more pleasing to some than to others. But the whole was arrived at by the marvelous process of democracy — the exchange of ideas, the compromise of one's own desires and wants and needs with those of other people; so that no one is left out entirely, and all are helped and strengthened.

And, at the very last, to the surprise of the rest of us in the Jackson county delegation, one of our own resolutions was presented to the assembly by the Speaker of the House, and was received enthusiastically and voted unanimously as a separate plank of the platform. We had felt it was an important—even vital — part of any platform, and the others all agreed. Here it is:

"Finally, recognizing that many, indeed most, of the above programs and benefits can be achieved only if we are willing to pay for them, we affirm our willingness, as good citizens of a progressive and forward-looking state, to submerge our private wants to the public good, to be ourselves willing to make the necessary sacrifices to secure those benefits for the people which we cannot otherwise

MAIL TRIBUNE, Medford, Or. 5

Wednesday, Feb. 3, 1960

secure. We recognize that a publicly-spent dollar is not necessarily an evil dollar, and that our state government and federal government will be, in the last analysis, a reflection of the true philosophy of our people."

7 p.m. Saturday

Nearly 500 Democrats crowded into the hall to hear National Chairman Paul Butler speak. It was, they say, the largest gathering of Democrats ever in Marion county.

Butler, an attorney, has an air of ascetic dedication. He is eloquent and precise, convinced and convincing. He spoke of the forthcoming presidential campaign, carefully avoiding the names of any of the several well-known candidates. He spoke proudly, however, of the man who would be nominated on the Democratic ticket as a man who "would put human values first," and referred to him as "the next President of the United States."

And so the first Democratic Platform Convention in Oregon was wound up in an atmosphere of confidence, zeal, and determination. And we are already talking about the next one!

Chessman Hearing Scheduled Friday

San Francisco — UPI — Chief Judge Richard H. Chambers of the Ninth U. S. Court of Appeals will hold a hearing Friday in Tucson, Ariz., on convict-author Caryl Chessman's latest petition to escape execution.

Chessman, 38, is scheduled to die in the gas chamber at San Quentin Prison on Feb. 19. He has sidestepped seven previous dates since 1948, when he was convicted for kidnap, robbery and rape in Los Angeles.

Chessman filed last Friday for a certificate of probable cause, which would give him the right to file a full-fledged appeal with the court. He also requested a stay of execution.

TO LAUNCH SATELLITE

London — UPI — Britain will launch its first space satellite late next year from an American base and using an American Scout rocket, a British space research scientist has disclosed. Professor H. S. W. Massey said a British delegation recently discussed the project with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in Washington. He said the satellite's planned orbit would carry it over England and Scotland.

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