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Robert E. Barton Allen

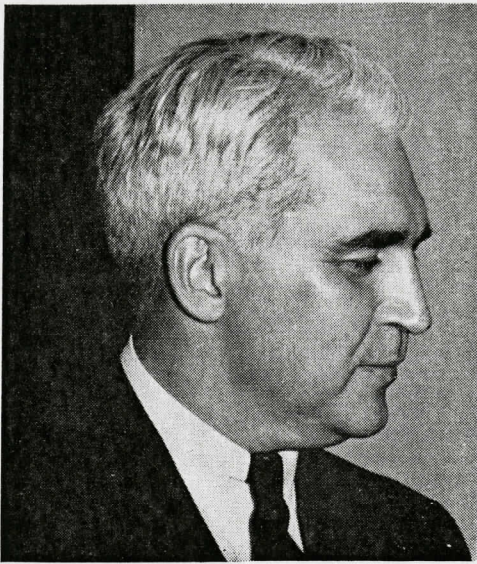
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Paul McNutt, the Sensation Of the Chicago Convention

*Prolonged and Unexpected Demonstration for I.U.
Alumnus Was the Highlight of the
Democratic Convention*

By Robert E. Barton Allen

"In the first place . . ."

OLDTIMERS in the political world could not promise much excitement for the 1940 Democratic convention in Chicago. It would be "Cut 'n dried," they said. The President would be re-nominated for a third term; his every wish would be observed in the platform which would follow closely the seven-year New Deal ideology; and that would be all there was to it.

Of course there was always the remote possibility that the President might refuse "to run" or "to be drafted"; but it was not likely. The inner circle had made it pretty definite. It was not worth a hot trip to the Windy City and the buffeting of a convention crowd if you were hunting excitement.

Yet some 40,000 delegates, observers, political hangers-on, and mildly curious jammed the great convention hall at one time or another to see the show. At times the great hall was more than half-empty. At other times meetings were dismissed as soon as they were called. The management was finding it difficult to keep the convention going until the Chicago hotels, taxicabs, and restaurants had recovered the amount of their generous gift to the convention fund.

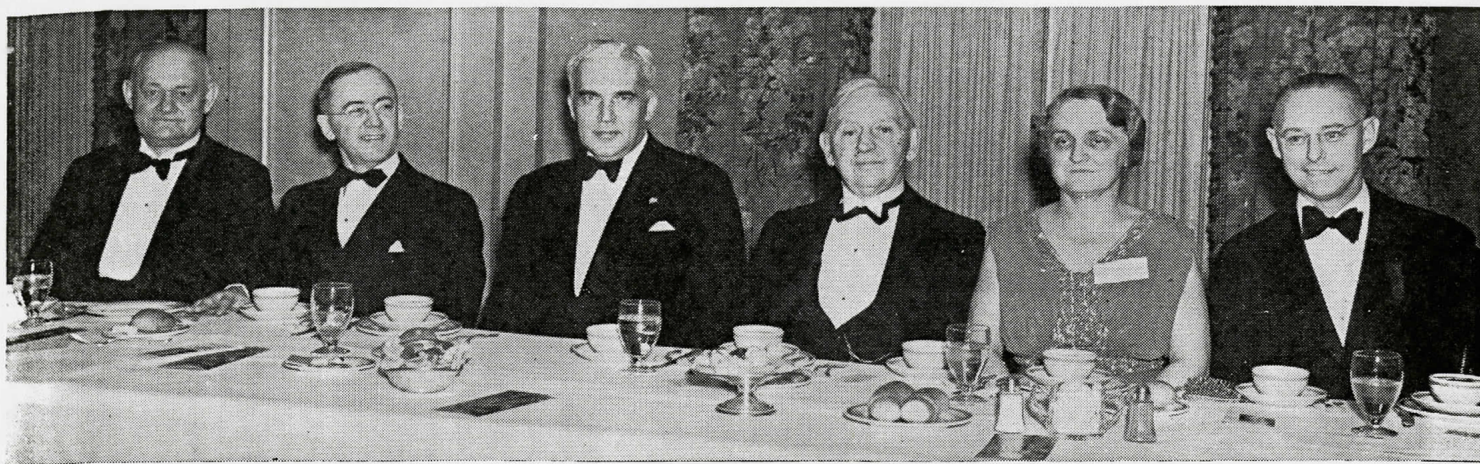
At last a ripple of drama and suspense ran through the delegations. The President had made arrangements for a well-chosen spokesman to carry his decision to the delegates. The hall was crowded. Senator Barkley, badly abusing the King's English in which the note was couched and for which the President is so justly famous, conveyed the idea that Mr. Roosevelt would prefer to leave the White House for the simple and private life of Hyde Park. But the gate was left wide ajar. It was definite now that the President would be re-nominated. Many delegates and spectators left for their down-town hotels where more excitement might be found. Many others left for home. The demonstrations for the third-time nominee were genuine; they were for the man that the convention, by and large, wanted as its standard-bearer. They were not the wild emotional outbursts characteristic of Democratic conventions. The results had been too long expected, too long taken for granted.

With the big show over, the convention tightened its belt and prepared for the side show, which this time might be the more spectacular. It was generally felt that the selection of the vice-presidential nominee would be a wide-open fight, the sort of thing which has made the Democratic conventions famous and has kept the democracy in Democratic. Various candidates looked sharply to their fences. It was agreed in the hotels and the lobbies that the men to watch were Justice William O. Douglas, Senator Barkley of Kentucky, Senator Bankhead of Alabama, Senator Byrnes of South Carolina, Senator Lucas of Illinois, Governor Stark of Missouri, Representative Rayburn of Texas, Secretary of Agriculture Wallace of Iowa, and Social Security Administrator PAUL V. MCNUTT, AB'13, Hon LLD'33, of Indiana. The boys who pulled your sleeve in the lobby to whisper they "had just found out" told you that it would be William O. Douglas.

Nominations for the vice-presidency were to take place at the Friday evening session. The bars were down. The President had accepted the third-term draft. His gracious wife was on her way to speak to the convention. Every man who had been born with the desire to be vice-president was now on his own. Greatest activity was seen about the Alabama headquarters and the palatial suite of the Indiana delegation in the Stevens Hotel. It was rumored that Harry Hopkins was working quietly but effectively—no one was sure quite for whom.

During the afternoon lull, delegates and observers milled about in the hotels and on the streets. They went from one candidate's headquarters to another. Almost without exception the headquarters were ordinary hotel suites with a secretary at the door. Unless your face or name were known to this Cerberus, you were not admitted. The candidate was out. She did not know when he would return. She would be glad to take your name.

But there was one exception to this rule. It was the Indiana Headquarters in the Boulevard Room of the Stevens Hotel. There were no doors to close. The great archways were wide, gaily decorated, inviting. Members of the Indiana Committee met you, welcomed you, asked



Always active in I.U. alumni affairs, McNutt has been the main speaker at many banquets. Above he is shown at the speakers' table at the alumni meeting held in St. Louis last spring. At his left is President Emeritus William Lowe Bryan.

what they might do for you. Great pictures of Paul McNutt smiled down upon you. A string ensemble made up of neat, snappily dressed college boys played popular tunes. As a college professor and two Indiana University members of the Jackson club appeared in the door, the ensemble left off in the middle of the "Beer Barrel Polka" to play "Indiana, Our Indiana." The three or four hundred visitors in the room, many graduates of the University, applauded the song. There was a spirit here in the Indiana headquarters of cheerfulness, of optimism, of business efficiency. People liked to congregate here. One could overhear a Texas drawl say, "This is the way a convention ought to be run." A Boston broad—"A" replied, "This headquarters is the only efficient thing I have seen at the convention." That was the general reaction.

Suddenly there was a roar of applause. Everyone stood on tiptoe. McNutt with a small group of advisers swept through the lobby. He was bowing and waving. He seemed satisfied. Then the news began to leak out. Arizona delegates had come over to urge Indiana to take Arizona's place on the roll call so that McNutt might be nominated early. Only Alabama's Bankhead would precede him. Then there had been a meeting of eleven of the Western States in which two-thirds or more of their votes had been pledged to the Administrator. Oklahoma and several Eastern States had promised their entire delegation. The skies were bright in the Boulevard Room of the Stevens Hotel at three o'clock on Friday afternoon.

Then came the rains. There were telephone calls from the White House. The President had "picked" his running mate. The vice-presidency was not to be a wide open fight. Mr. Roosevelt was said to have made Wallace's selection the condition of his own acceptance. A hush fell over the Boulevard Room. The news went slowly, even tearfully around. "Paul could have had it, too," was heard on all hands. "We won't give in like that," said others. "We'll fight it out on the convention floor." But soon the word came from McNutt himself. "Call it off boys. Let's be good soldiers and support the President. He is my commander-in-chief." Most of the Indiana backers left the hotel, the convention, and even Chicago. They went sorrowfully and

angrily home. "It might have been!" Those who remained went half-heartedly to the convention hall to hear the Secretary of Agriculture nominated. McNutt's name had been withdrawn; it would not be placed before the assembly.

When the roll call began, the name of Senator William Bankhead was first to be placed in nomination. Even before the speaker had closed his address the Alabama delegates, followed by most of their brethren south of the Mason-Dixon Line, were sweeping into the aisle. A sense of drama began to be felt. Was the solid South in revolt against the President's wishes? The demonstrations continued for 20 minutes. The Bankhead group represented a powerful minority. Were all of these delegates supporting Bankhead, or were they protesting Wallace, was asked up and down in the galleries.

The seconding speeches droned on. The delegates and galleries smoked, buzzed, and drank thousands of bottles of pop. Everyone was bored. It was a set show and not a very exciting one. Convention leaders were trying desperately to hurry the nomination through before the large anti-Wallace block could gain further power. And then Delaware gave way to Oklahoma. A vigorous young man by the name of Don Wells, speaker of the House of Oklahoma, fairly bounced to the microphone. There was decision and command in his actions and his voice. An immediate hush fell in the hall. "The man I am about to nominate is not the choice of the professional politicians"—but he was drowned out by the roar of approval from the floor and galleries. "My candidate is the choice of the rank and file of the American people"—and again his voice was lost in the roar of approval. At this time few people in the hall knew whom Speaker Wells was about to nominate; but they did approve his statements. "My man is Paul V. McNutt. . . ."

At the mention of McNutt's name pandemonium broke loose. Oklahoma's delegates were in the aisle; California and Texas were following; Connecticut was out, then Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, Colorado. Indiana's delegates, under strong instructions from their chief, sat tight until 19 other states were in the aisle. 21,000 people were in the

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Paul V. McNutt

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hall at the time. The roar of the galleries was deafening. The enthusiasm of a major part of the delegates on the floor was surprising to the Administrator's friends and foes alike. The band and the great organ used for whipping up party spirit remained strangely quiet. Chairman Barkley tried to shut off the demonstration. No one, except the radio audience, heard him.

After 12 minutes of demonstration the smiling, white-haired Administrator came to the platform to withdraw his name. The demonstration continued unabated. He could not make himself heard. "In the first place—," he shouted into the microphone. "No, no," yelled the crowd who already knew his intention. The demonstration continued. "We want McNutt; we want McNutt," screamed the galleries with wilder rhythm than a cheer leader can whip up at an Indiana-Purdue game. Here was a revolt that the convention managers had not anticipated. Neither had Administrator McNutt.

"This is the most dramatic moment in recent political history," said the director of the Institute of Politics at one of the major universities to his companion. "You see before you a man with the nomination for the vice-presidency in his hand, if he will but raise that hand." McNutt raised his hand but shook his head. "In the second place then—" he tried again, but his voice was lost in the chorus of "No! No!" The demonstration by both delegates and galleries left doubt in no one's mind that here was the man of the hour, the Democratic Party's favorite son at the moment. The *Chicago Tribune* remarked dryly next morning: "McNutt could have had the nomination by acclamation."

"It would be ungracious if I failed to give some recognition to those who have supported me," McNutt was saying to the radio audience. Slowly the convention hall began to grow quiet. "Our party stands on the record of the past seven years. It goes to the people under the leadership of the greatest peacetime President in the history of the nation. . . . America needs strong, logical, liberal, able leaders in the kind of a world we are living in today. . . . Franklin Delano Roosevelt is such a leader. . . . He is my leader; and I am here to support his choice for vice-presidency."

It would be both futile and unfair not to report the dissatisfaction with which many McNutt backers greeted this decision. Many felt that the Security Administrator had failed to seize power when it was literally beating at his door. Others felt that he had done the right, the sporting, "the good soldier" thing. All agreed on certain issues; that McNutt had the lion's share of the ovations from both delegates and galleries at the convention; that McNutt left the convention a far more powerful and a more admired figure than when he entered it; that regardless of which party wins in November, here is a leader with a national backing that the administration in power can not ignore. As one who saw the proceedings of the 1940 Convention, there is no doubt in my mind that McNutt will be for the next four years (FDR alone excepted) the Democrats' Favorite Son.

The October 1940