Progressives Elect Will H. Hays
Republican National Chairman, 1918

*James O. Robertson*

The Republican national committee met in St. Louis in February of 1918 to elect a new national chairman for the party. The country was in the midst of a great war, but war could not keep the party professionals from planning the 1918 congressional campaign. The Republicans had been out of power since the presidential inauguration of 1913: Woodrow Wilson was in the White House, and Democrats also controlled both houses of Congress. Five years was longer than Republicans had spent so completely out of power since Lincoln had been inaugurated in 1861, and party leaders—world war or no world war—were desperate to win an election. To win, the party would have to overcome the normal patriotic support of a wartime administration and the appeals of President Wilson for a nonpartisan campaign in 1918. But more important for the professionals, if the Republicans were to win, the breach that had torn the party apart in 1912 and had only been partially healed in 1916 would have to be completely mended.1

In 1912 Theodore Roosevelt, the energetic Republican ex-President, had led a group of disgruntled followers out of the Republican convention and formed a new Progressive party whose symbol had been a big bull moose. Roosevelt, as the nominee of the Bull Moose Progressives, had campaigned against Republican President William Howard Taft and Democrat Woodrow Wilson. The result had been a split in the normal Republican vote—and the election of Wilson.2

The progressives who had formed a party around Roosevelt in 1912 were only part of a much larger group of people, both in and out of politics, who were trying to adjust American attitudes and American political and governmental institutions to the forces of industrial change, urban growth, and agricultural decline that had developed in the United States since the end of the Civil War. In the first decade of the twentieth century the progressive movement, as it came to be called, included urban political reformers, social workers, agricultural reformers, labor leaders, conservationists, big businessmen, journalists, and an increasing number of young political leaders. Both major parties had reacted slowly to progressivism, but the accident of an assassin’s bullet and Roosevelt’s enthusiastic penchant for propagandizing

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WILL H. HAYS.

Courtesy Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.
Hays Elected Republican National Chairman

good causes put him in the presidency at the beginning of the century and encouraged the growth of progressivism within the Republican party. During Roosevelt’s presidency (1901-1909), young progressives had made their careers and established their political bases in the Republican party on platforms involving political reform (direct election of senators, initiative, referendum, and direct primary), “trust-busting,” the reduction of the uncontrolled power of big business, economic regulation through commissions of trained experts, increased executive leadership at all levels of government, stronger national government, conservation of resources, and humanitarianism.\(^3\)

As the progressive politicians rose from local and state to national office, they found themselves increasingly in conflict with entrenched political leaders backed, in many cases, by entrenched economic interests. In the Democratic party, the progressives made adjustments to some of the older leadership groups, most notably those around William Jennings Bryan. In the Republican party, however, both the structure of the “old guard”—a cooptive group based in the Senate and jealous of its power—and the verbal encouragement of President Roosevelt tended to heighten the progressives’ consciousness of themselves as a different and “better” group within the party with their own identity and their own programs. So long as he was President and effective leader of the Republican party, Roosevelt was able—by deft manipulation, cajolery, and occasional use of the “big stick”—to keep the progressives and the old guard from coming to blows.\(^4\)

Roosevelt’s hand-picked successor, William Howard Taft (1909-1913), was not so deft. Although an able administrator, Taft was not an effective party leader. On issues crucial to them, Taft alienated the progressives in his party. He also alienated—and then infuriated—Roosevelt, who, in his fifties and still bouncingly energetic, found it unbearable to be absent from the center of power. Roosevelt campaigned against Taft in the Republican primaries in 1912, won most of them, but did not win the convention. He then formed his own party.\(^5\)

The Progressive party never, even at its inception, included all the Republican progressives, nor did it include all the progressive-minded people in the country. Wilson, himself a Democratic progressive, appealed not only to like-minded people in his own party but to some independents and Republican progressives as well. (Progressive Republican Senator Robert La

\(^3\) The arguments about who the progressives were and what they were trying to do are conflicting. Some of the better presentations of the arguments are: Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955); George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley, 1951); George E. Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 1900-1912* (New York, 1958); Russel B. Nye, *Midwestern Progressive Politics* (East Lansing, 1959); and Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (Glencoe, 1963).


Follette of Wisconsin, among others, supported Wilson in 1912.) Nor were all those who joined the Progressive party of one mind. Some liked the party's strong, idealistic platform but distrusted its candidate and his followers. There were those who backed Roosevelt but had grave doubts about the progressive program. There were others who liked both. After the loss of the election of 1912, some factions—notably those who disliked Roosevelt and his men—left the party. After disastrous losses in the local elections in 1914, more splinter groups and individual leaders deserted. By 1916, except for the ardent followers of Roosevelt—and even they were divided—the Bull Moose party had fallen apart.\(^6\)

Roosevelt was still eager for power. He tried to use the remnants of the Progressive party and the threat of another break with the Republicans to bargain his way to the Republican nomination in 1916. He lost. Charles Evans Hughes, associate justice of the Supreme Court and former progressive governor of Roosevelt's own state of New York, was nominated. The old guard Republican leadership, more firmly entrenched in the control of the party machinery since Roosevelt and his progressive followers had bolted, did not trust the former President. They had nominated Hughes because he was a mild progressive who had been neutral in 1912 (due to his position on the Supreme Court). They hoped Hughes would bring the progressive voters back to the Republican fold, and with them would come the power the party had lost in 1912.\(^7\)

Hughes failed, although the election was a close one. Many Republican leaders blamed the loss on the Bull Moose Progressives, who had not been very enthusiastic in their support of Hughes despite the fact that the Progressive party organization had endorsed him and the campaign had been run by a joint Progressive-Republican committee. With the Republicans' defeat, the old guard leaders decided to get rid of Hughes' men, including William R. Willcox, the national chairman. They wanted to put in men acceptable to the old guard and to run the party as they wished. The progressive Republicans, particularly the old Bull Moosers, wanted "real" progressives in control of the Republican organization, not "luke-warm" Hughes progressives. They wanted to take over the Republican party, having failed with their own party, and make it a truly progressive organization. Roosevelt still wanted another Republican nomination, and some of his devoted followers wanted men favorable to him—whatever their feelings about progressivism—in control of the Republican party. There were, too, some young

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Republican leaders who were eager to forget the differences between the old guard and the progressives and get to the business of winning elections.8

These were the groups who met in St. Louis early in 1918 to elect a new Republican national chairman. These were the interests the new chairman would have to reconcile if the Republicans were to win the Congress in 1918 and the presidency in 1920.

The fight for control of the Republican organization started soon after the 1916 election was lost. Losing an election is always a blow to the power and prestige of a national chairman, and if he is not strongly backed by the professionals and the party leadership groups, his position is difficult at best. Chairman Willcox found himself attacked from all sides after November, 1916, and to try to bring some solution to the problem he called the executive committee of the national committee to meet after New Years Day, 1917.9

Among those invited to the Republican executive committee meeting were two men who were still officially members of the Progressive party: George W. Perkins, the chairman of the Bull Moose party and the man who, next to Roosevelt, was symbolic of that party and all it meant to the Republican professionals; and Everett Colby, Perkins' colleague on the Progressive party staff. They were invited because they had been members of the joint Progressive-Republican campaign committee and because the Republicans felt they represented not only the progressives but also Roosevelt and his ambitions.

Perkins was a former partner in the J. P. Morgan and Company bank. His offer of financial backing had enabled Roosevelt to make the decision to form his own party in 1912. Since that time Perkins had been Roosevelt's "right-hand man" and chairman of the Progressive party's executive committee. He had managed Roosevelt's effort to capture the 1916 Republican nomination, and after that failed, he had taken on himself the task of easing the Bull Moosers officially back into the Republican party and using their strength to help Roosevelt get the 1920 Republican nomination. The Republican regulars seemed to regard Perkins as a necessary, but evil, part of the workings of the Republican executive committee.10

At the Republican committee meeting in January, 1917, Perkins planned to negotiate the formal reentry of the Progressives into the GOP and to try to get official progressive representation on Republican party councils. The old guard on the executive committee intended to get Chairman Willcox to resign. Failing that, they planned to assure a regular Republican successor

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9 Statement to the press by George W. Perkins and Everett Colby, January 15, 16, 1917, Perkins Papers.

to Willcox when he did resign. With or without Willcox, they intended to exclude progressive leaders from any position of power in the party.\(^\text{11}\)

The executive committee meeting was nearly a total success for the Republican regulars. They did not force Willcox out, but they elected a vice chairman, obviously intended to be his successor. They tied Willcox’ hands by putting the power to decide all matters of “publicity, finance, and expense” jointly in the hands of the chairman, the new vice chairman, and the treasurer. The vice chairman, John T. Adams of Dubuque, Iowa, and the treasurer, Fred W. Upham of Illinois, were both old guard regulars. They could therefore control Willcox and suppress any progressive influence on the national organization.

Perkins did not even get a chance to present his plan for the reconciliation of the progressives. The vice chairmanship was the committee’s first order of business, and upon Adams’ election, Perkins and Colby left the meeting in a huff. Later in the evening they issued a joint denunciation of the committee’s action to the press and appealed to progressive leaders across the country for support.\(^\text{12}\)

The progressives rallied to Perkins, but their support was not altogether enthusiastic. In general, they did not think there was any “prospect of concessions being made by the old line organization.” One of them wrote Perkins: “I feel that the Republican Organization is utterly hopeless from our point of view.” Most progressives agreed, and most of them felt Perkins had made a tactical error in trying to negotiate with the Republican leadership at all. They were not surprised he had failed.\(^\text{13}\)

Two days after Perkins walked out of the Republican meeting, a group of progressive leaders met in Washington to discuss, among other things, how to get rid of him. For some time these leaders—centered around progressive editor Chester Rowell of California, urban reformer Harold Ickes of Illinois, and pioneer conservationist Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania—all of whom considered themselves “westerners,” had been at cross purposes with the “eastern” leadership of the Progressive party organization around Perkins. These westerners had early banded together on the basis of a common love of Roosevelt, a dislike of Perkins, and an effort to control the direction of the Progressive party. They had cooperated with Perkins and his group in public in order to maintain party unity. They had worked hard to help the progressive cause in the 1916 campaign. After that campaign they had published a program for progressives, calling for a national conference and

\(^{11}\) George W. Perkins to William D. Lewis, January 15, 1917, Perkins Papers.

\(^{12}\) The committee meeting had been well planned by the old guard. Ex-Senator James Hemenway of Indiana with three others on the committee were in favor of Adams. Willcox and three members were for the progressives, but Hemenway had proxies from three absent members and carried the day. Indiana State Chairman Will Hays was present but did not participate in the action. Statement by George W. Perkins and Everett Colby, January 15, 16, 1917; and telegrams to over one hundred progressive leaders, January 16, 1917, Perkins Papers; Herbert Parsons to Perkins, February 1, 1917, Parsons Papers; New York Tribune, January 17, 1917.

\(^{13}\) Miles Poindexter to George W. Perkins, February 2, 1917; Robert P. Bass to Perkins, February 22, 1917; and other letters in response to Perkins’ telegram, in folders of January and February, 1917, Perkins Papers.
Hays Elected Republican National Chairman

Perkins' eastern group of leaders had little direct contact with progressive voters. Their influence depended largely upon their close relationship with Roosevelt. So long as he needed them they were powerful. Of the entire group Perkins himself was the man closest to Roosevelt and the man with the least personal political power. In the attempt to reenter the Republican organization, these men felt they could not afford to demand, but rather had to negotiate carefully and quietly for place in the Republican machinery. They could not flaunt progressive strength because there was no assurance that that strength would be behind them if their bluff were called.

The western progressive group felt it could use progressive voting strength as a bludgeon if necessary to back up their demands for place, power, and ultimately control in the national Republican organization. Most of the progressive voting strength, and all of the progressive strength in local Republican party organizations, was concentrated in the Middle and Far West. The westerners felt themselves to be the natural leaders of that strength. After what they felt was the failure of compromising with the old guard Republicans in the 1916 campaign, they wanted to get rid of "eastern" control, "take the initiative," and bring about a "new deal" which was to be a "Western deal." Even before Perkins met with the Republican committee, they had made plans and started projects without his knowledge and had speculated on how to get rid of him.

When Perkins failed with the Republicans, the westerners jumped at their chance. One of them went to demand his resignation as chairman of the executive committee. Perkins proved "difficult" and refused to resign. Ickes appealed to Roosevelt on behalf of the westerners. The western leaders,

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14 The "western" group included Ickes (later Franklin D. Roosevelt's secretary of the interior), Pinchot (first chief forester of the United States under Theodore Roosevelt and later governor of Pennsylvania, 1923-1927, 1931-1935), Rowell (close friend of Senator Hiram Johnson), William Allen White (already renowned for his Kansas paper, the Emporia Gazette), James R. Garfield (son of the President and Theodore Roosevelt's secretary of the interior), Raymond Robins (wealthy Chicago liberal reformer and lecturer), Henry Allen (Kansas publisher, later governor of Kansas, 1919-1923), Donald Richberg (Ickes' law partner, later a famous New Dealer), and several others who were close to the group but not so active in its affairs, such as Dean William Draper Lewis of the University of Pennsylvania Law School; Senator Hiram Johnson, the progressive leader of California; and Herbert Knox Smith, eminent Connecticut lawyer and Theodore Roosevelt's commissioner of corporations. Harold L. Ickes to James R. Garfield, January 20, 1917; George W. Perkins to William A. White, December 29, 1916, Gifford Pinchot Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; transcript of telephone conversations, June 5-7, 1916; William A. White to Perkins, December 16, 1916; Gifford Pinchot Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.


16 Ickes and Pinchot both set up state Progressive leagues. They also decided to call a national progressive conference over the objections of Perkins and Roosevelt. Harold L. Ickes to Gifford Pinchot, July 8, November 11, December 21, 1916; Pinchot to Ickes, December 15, 26, 1916; William A. White to Ickes, December 16, 1916; Pinchot to White, December 26, 1916, Pinchot Papers.
he said, had worked without benefit of Perkins for some time in order to “indicate that every progressive movement was not a Perkins movement.” Perkins’ effort to win “by indirect and secret means” what the westerners wanted to win “by open challenge”—namely control of the Republican party—had destroyed all progressive confidence in him. Ickes wrote: “The progressives . . . are not interested in dickering for representation of their leaders. . . . The progressives want a big issue. They don’t want to compromise with the old guard; they want to throw them out; they don’t want to divide control; they want to take control. . . .” The westerners, Ickes concluded, were going to drop Perkins. It would be well, he thought, if Roosevelt did too. The “petty political row” Perkins had started with the Republicans, he warned, might well prove fatal to Roosevelt’s hopes for the nomination in 1920.17

Fortunately for Ickes and his friends the coming of World War I to America submerged their dispute with Perkins. Having taken a private stand against him, they were at a loss to do anything more. If Roosevelt did not publicly kick Perkins out, the westerners would, as Pinchot remarked, find it difficult “to make Progressives over the country understand in any statement we might issue why we are opposing what Perkins is doing.” Roosevelt did finally tell Perkins to let the westerners go their own way, but the war had already intervened.18

The war brought, too, a hiatus in the fight Perkins had started with the Republican executive committee. Chairman Willcox refused to call a meeting of the full national committee, despite pressure from Perkins, and the announced preliminary plans for the 1918 Republican campaign completely ignored the progressives. Perkins’ position vis-a-vis the Republican leadership was increasingly weakened by Roosevelt’s drift toward the regular Republicans, as well as by the coolness of the other progressive leaders toward him.19

Ickes, Perkins, and many of the other progressives quickly found themselves useful war work, and, for a while, politics fell into the background. But by January, 1918, it was no longer possible for politicians to ignore politics—a congressional campaign was about to begin. On January 11, 1918, Willcox sent out a call for a Republican national committee meeting to be held in St. Louis on February 12.


18 More than seventeen letters were exchanged in a two week period among the westerners about getting rid of Perkins. See especially Gifford Pinchot to Harold L. Ickes, January 22, 1917; Pinchot to James R. Garfield, March 7, 1917, Pinchot Papers; Medill McCormick to George W. Perkins, February 4, 1917; Perkins to McCormick, February 8, 1917; Perkins to Theodore Roosevelt, January 20, 1917, Perkins Papers.

Four days later Willcox resigned as chairman of the national committee. He left the choice of his successor to the committee members. So confident were the old guard leaders that they controlled the Republican machinery and would elect the new chairman that they invited the progressive members of the 1916 joint Progressive-Republican committee to the St. Louis meeting, and told them that John T. Adams, the vice chairman, would be “promoted” to Willcox’ place. Perkins was informed that the two progressive senators from Iowa, Adams’ home state, had given their “enthusiastic” approval to the choice of Adams. The regulars seemed to have the situation well in hand.20

Perkins could not have been surprised by Willcox’ resignation or by the announcement that Adams would succeed him. Nor had his strategy changed in the year since the Republican executive committee had elected Adams vice chairman. His desire was still to win a place for progressives. Now he decided to concentrate his efforts on the national chairmanship because he thought he might win the fight for a single place—even so important a place.21

Perkins’ first move was to try to solidify the progressive strength behind him. The progressive members of the 1916 campaign committee had been evenly divided between Perkins’ friends—Perkins, Colby, and Oscar S. Straus—and the western group—Ickes, James Garfield, and Rowell. The westerners refused to support Perkins in his new efforts. Rowell, recovering from an attack of typhus in California, refused even to come to the St. Louis meeting. “For fifty years,” he wrote to Perkins, “the Executive Committee of the Republican Party has been the governing body of the United States, and it has been a self-perpetuating autocracy.” It had proved itself “invincible” in 1912 and again in 1916, and Rowell doubted that it would abdicate “by its own consent,” which was what would have to happen if the progressives were to get any power on the national committee.22

None of the westerners thought there was any chance to elect a really progressive national chairman. They were loathe to spend their energies and their political capital fighting against a member of the old guard. They wanted to fight for a progressive. They appealed to Roosevelt for advice, but he had no desire for an open battle with theregulars and refused to give advice. Finally, only one westerner, Ickes, went to the meeting at all; and although he maintained open opposition to Perkins, so far as the public was concerned and so far as the old guard leaders could see, Perkins went to the St. Louis meeting the admitted leader of and spokesman for the progressives in the Republican party.23

20 George W. Perkins to Nicholas M. Butler, January 11, 1918; Perkins to all progressive leaders, January 25, 1918; John W. Weeks to Perkins, January 15, 24, 1918, Perkins Papers. The two Iowa senators were Albert B. Cummins and William S. Kenyon whose relationship with the regular Republican organization in Iowa, controlled by Adams, required that they support Adams.
21 George W. Perkins to Hiram W. Johnson, January 11, 1918; Perkins to Walter F. Brown and John C. Shaffer, January 16, 1918; Perkins to progressive leaders, January 19, 1918; Perkins to Chester Rowell, January 30, 1918, Perkins Papers.
22 Chester Rowell to George W. Perkins, January 25, 1918, Perkins Papers.
23 Harold L. Ickes to Theodore Roosevelt, January 24, 1918; Roosevelt to Ickes, February 1, 1918, Ickes Papers; George W. Perkins to Walter Brown, February 6, 7, 1918; James R. Garfield to Perkins, February 6, 1918; Perkins to Ickes, February 5, 1918; Ickes to Perkins, February 6, 1918, Perkins Papers.
Having gained at least the appearance of progressive support, Perkins threw down the gauntlet to the old guard. He told Senator John W. Weeks of Massachusetts, who was close to the old guard leaders, that the progressives intended to fight the election of Adams, and he threatened progressive defection from the Republicans if the “old line members” of the leadership insisted on maintaining “complete control” of the party. He mentioned no candidate for the chairmanship, but the man selected would, he said, have to have “the ability to harmonize” and “the ability to organize” if he were to gain his support and that of the progressives.24

Senator Weeks replied that only two men had been mentioned for the national chairmanship: Will Hays, the young chairman of the Indiana Republican state committee, and Adams, a man who had been a devoted, hard-working member of the national committee for years, who knew people all over the country, and who was “in a sense in line for promotion.” Hays, Weeks wrote off as “an excellent man,” but one who might run for governor of Indiana and one who, if he were elected chairman, might have to have “ample compensation,” a death-dealing blow considering the public prejudice against paid political managers. Adams, Weeks said, was “likely to be selected.” But at the same time the progressives would not be neglected. It would be the purpose of “whoever is in charge of the organization to try to induce” Perkins himself, Colby, and others “to become a part of the working organization.” Weeks told Perkins that “undoubtedly” he and “Colonel Roosevelt could indicate whoever you thought desirable for that connection.” Given the possibility of naming their own representatives to the Republican organization, it did not seem to Weeks that “there ought to be any quarrel over this matter of the chairmanship” from Perkins, Roosevelt, or their supporters. The old guard was willing to bend to pressure, but they had no intention of giving the chairmanship to anyone but a man of their own choosing. The progressives were pushing too hard: “Nothing can be gained by trying to demonstrate that we are not anxious for the success of the Republican party,” Weeks lashed out, or “that we are inimical to sane, reasonable, and real progress.” The old guard leaders, he pointed out, “have the approval of the voters of our own States.” Furthermore, Weeks claimed that he himself had “actually been insistent on more real liberal legislation than half the men in public life who pose as progressives.” The progressives could have their patronage, but they could not have the chairmanship.25

Weeks’ mention of Hays had been deliberate. By the end of January, 1918, it was clear that Hays was making a strong bid for the chairmanship and that Perkins, and perhaps the progressive organization, might well be quietly supporting him. So it must have seemed to Weeks and his old guard friends.

When Hays started actively to seek the job of chairman is not clear, and probably never will be. Politicians of that day tended to be very shy of putting down on paper their actual motives and desires; even their con-

24 George W. Perkins to John W. Weeks, January 29, 1918, Perkins Papers.
25 John W. Weeks to George W. Perkins, January 30, 1918, Perkins Papers.
conversation, except in the most confidential of circumstances, was elliptical. It was part of the political game, and many of them played that game with great zest, using simple codes, wearing disguises occasionally, making dashing, unannounced trips to mysterious destinations, and scrawling "Personal and Confidential!!" across even the most inconsequential letters to their colleagues. It was not proper to be seeking office; one had to be "called." Efforts to win office had to be couched in terms that could immediately be disclaimed. All the commonplace efforts which ambitious men make to achieve their goals—all the pressures, the arm twisting and occasional blackmail, the influence sought and brought to bear, the returning of favors, even the canvassing of votes—had to be removed from the public eye and the public consciousness. Hays was a good politician, and no direct record has been found concerning when he started to seek the office of Republican national committee chairman. On record, there are—to the day he was elected and long after—constant denials that he was seeking the office at all.23

Hays first came to national attention during the Republican campaign of 1916 when his Indiana organization carried the state for Hughes and the Republicans by a great majority in the face of a general Democratic victory in the Midwest and the nation. Hays was a skillful organizer of party workers and something of an innovator of modern campaign techniques (the "citizens" committees and advisory groups of eminent public leaders for campaign organizations). He had also very carefully brought the old Bull Moose Progressives back to the Republican fold in Indiana by cooperating with their local organizations where they were powerful and by dividing the higher offices in the state organization among the regular Republicans and the progressives. He had, thereby, undercut the independent progressive organization in the state and at the same time had "harmonized" the two wings of the Republican party into a working unit. His efforts had brought recognition from the national Republican campaign organization during the campaign, and some national publicity as well. There were progressives who were not happy about his performance, perhaps out of disappointment that the progressive organization in Indiana had succumbed so easily to blandishments of place, preferment, and prestige. Ickes, years later, expressed best the progressive dislike of Hays when he wrote that "considering the dollars that were poured into Indiana, the campaign paraphernalia and the man power that were literally dumped into the Hoosier campaign [by the national campaign committee], any second-rate precinct committeeman could have delivered it to Dopey the Dwarf." It was, however, a back-handed tribute to Hays' skill as a political manager that he could have gotten such preferential treatment from the national campaign headquarters.27

After the 1916 campaign was over, Hays carefully maintained his con-


tacts with the national Republican organization and with the progressive organization as represented by Perkins. He travelled frequently to New York to see Perkins and other Republican leaders in his capacity as state Republican leader, and after the United States declared war in April, 1917, in his capacity as head of the Indiana Council for Defense. The defense council post gave him an excellent opportunity to maintain his political contacts in Indiana, and to expand his contacts nationally, in a context of patriotic defense work rather than of crude, partisan politics. He supported Perkins in 1917, in Perkins' battle with the Republican executive committee, while he remained in the good graces of Willcox and some of the regular Republican leaders of Indiana—Governor James P. Goodrich and Senators Harry S. New and James E. Watson.  

Sometime in 1917, New undertook to begin a quiet campaign to gain the national chairmanship for Hays. New was very careful about his methods. He talked confidentially to state and national political leaders about Hays but never mentioned him publicly. His timing was equally careful. Newspaper reports of Hays' candidacy did not begin, even in Hays' own locale, until late in 1917. On November 25, 1917, the Cincinnati Enquirer reported: "it is declared that Senator Harry S. New and other well-known Republicans have enlisted in a movement" to elect Hays national chairman. "It is said," the Enquirer continued in a special dispatch from Indianapolis, that national committee members had been approached and that "there is considerable sentiment in his [Hays'] favor."  

A month later, in late December, 1917, there were reports of Hays' candidacy in Chicago and Washington newspapers, and Hays was beginning to receive assurances of support based on press reports. On New's advice, Hays denied categorically any knowledge of the "movement" to elect him chairman: "I know nothing about the matter, have no information directly or indirectly about it and, of course, am not interested in any way whatsoever," he wrote to one volunteer supporter. He conferred quietly in Washington with Indiana Republican leaders—Governor Goodrich, Senator Watson, and ex-Senator James Hemenway, the Indiana Republican national committeeman—but even to them he denied any knowledge of his candidacy. After one meeting he wrote Watson, quite innocently: "I want to do in all these things what you and the boys want, but this comes to me entirely out of a clear sky, and I do not know what to say."  

Hays obtained the support of Willcox, although how much the outgoing and somewhat discredited head of the party could do was questionable. By

28 Medill McCormick to George W. Perkins, February 4, 1917, Perkins Papers; Harry S. New to Will Hays, December 19, 1917, Hays Papers; Hays, Memoirs, 148. Ex-Senator Albert J. Beveridge, an influential progressive Republican, was out of Indiana, except for occasional visits, throughout 1917 and most of 1918. He did not take part in Hays' campaign for the chairmanship.  
29 Cincinnati Enquirer, November 25, 1917.  
the end of January, 1918, support for Hays had come from many of the discontented elements in the party. New reported strong and important support for Hays among some members of the national committee. And Perkins had decided that Hays was to be the candidate of the progressives.31

Before he went openly to work for him, Perkins assured himself that the Hoosier would accept the chairmanship and that he would not have to be paid a salary. Perkins then sought out some of the national committeemen with whom he had worked in the past. Alvin T. "Tobe" Hert of Kentucky, was one of these, and Hert became the liason between Perkins' group and New, the campaign leader for Hays. Perkins was instrumental in forcing Hemenway, a powerful member of the old guard leadership, to endorse his fellow Hoosier, but neither Perkins nor New put much faith in Hemenway's support. In fact it became clear that Hemenway, despite his endorsement of Hays, was Adams' principal supporter in the fight for the chairmanship.32

Despite all New and Perkins could do, it seemed probable that when the national committee met, Adams would be elected chairman. He claimed to have the support of thirty-five of the forty-seven committeemen who intended to go to St. Louis, and there was, so far as Adams himself knew, "no united opposition" to his candidacy.33 There were committeemen opposed to Adams, but the Hays forces had not been able to get them to unite on their candidate. The problem seemed to be that no one near the national committee thought Hays could win, and they were loathe to risk their political necks in a fight that seemed doomed to fail. As one Indiana congressman wrote Hays, after New had asked that all the Indiana congressmen campaign for him: "we fear that . . . it might leave us in a bad shape, if we got likked [sic]." To get national committeemen to go back on their promises to Adams would require some very clear indication that he could be beaten.34

Adams himself received the first intimation that the opposition might be dangerous. He had written to Roosevelt in an effort to get his help against Perkins, whose opposition had at least become annoying. Roosevelt's reply concealed a knife:

I need hardly say that I have none but the friendliest feeling toward you, but I do not think it is wise for you to accept the Chairmanship at this time and under existing

32 Besides Hert, Perkins was working with National Committeeman R. B. Howell of Nebraska; Senator William Calder of New York; Walter F. Brown, a Toledo publisher who had been a financial backer of the Progressive party; and John C. Shaffer, a Chicago publisher who had also backed the progressives. R. B. Howell to George W. Perkins, February 2, 1918; Joseph M. Dixon to Perkins, February 4, 1918, Perkins Papers; William M. Calder to Herbert Parsons, February 18, 1918, Parsons Papers; Harry S. New to Will Hays, January 24, 1918; Hays to New, January 26, 1918, Hays Papers.
33 John T. Adams to Herbert Parsons, February 19, 1918, Parsons Papers; Garraty, Right-Hand Man, 369.
34 Harry S. New to Will Hays, January 26, 1918; Oscar E. Bland to Hays, February 1, 1918, Hays Papers.
conditions... I did incidentally hear... that you were said to have approved
the sinking of the _Lusitania_, or at least to have defended the Germans for so doing,
and on other occasions to have expressed very strong pro-German feelings. This in-
formation came to me at second hand and I have paid no heed to it.35

A member of Perkins' group sent a private investigator to Iowa on a
tip that Adams was "pro-German." Adams and his family had gone to
Germany before the war, and, on his return, after the outbreak of the conflict
in Europe, he had written news stories and letters in Iowa papers recounting
his own favorable impressions of the Germans and advocating friendliness
toward them. Although not all the details of Adams' pro-German stand were
in Perkins' hands before the national committee met, there was enough in-
formation to start rumors and to get Roosevelt to threaten the vice chairman.36
Adams' supporters had already complained that New had "bound volumes
of the Dubuque newspapers" in his office and was trying to find material to
use against Adams in Hays' favor. New simply denied that Hays had anything
to do with it.37

The implication of the threat to Adams was harsh. If the progressives
or Roosevelt or New could establish the vice chairman's "pro-German" stand
as a public fact, it would ruin Adams and could possibly lose the 1918
election for the Republican party. Most Americans during the war were
extremely suspicious of anyone suspected of friendly feelings toward the
Germans, past or present. Roosevelt, among many others, had put his
enormous national prestige behind a crusade for "Americanism" in the
war—a viciously intolerant crusade against differences of opinion about the
war—and most of America followed. Loyalty to America, as defined by
super patriots such as Roosevelt had become, was for all but the very strongest
of political leaders something a man seeking office had constantly to prove.
Certain defeat faced any politician accused on the basis of evidence such as
Perkins and New had accumulated against Adams.

Roosevelt was not eager to have Adams as chairman of the party, since
the latter had been closely associated with the men who had blocked his
nomination by the Republicans in 1916. Roosevelt grasped the opportunity
to get rid of Adams without an open fight and to get a chairman who might
be more sympathetic to his own nomination in 1920.38 On February 6,
Roosevelt sent John King, Republican boss of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and

35 Theodore Roosevelt to John T. Adams, February 5, 1918, Theodore Roosevelt
Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.
36 All of Adams' articles had been written in 1914 and 1915. Report of investigator,
undated, in folder of February, 1918, Perkins Papers; Ogden Reid to William R.
Willcox, February 6, 1918; Perkins to progressive leaders, February 16, 1918, Perkins
Papers; Alice Roosevelt Longworth, _Crowded Hours_ (New York, 1933), 270-71.
37 Harry S. New to Will Hays, January 31, 1918, Hays Papers.
38 Adams was being supported by W. Murray Crane of Massachusetts, who had
been instrumental in blocking Roosevelt's nomination in 1916. W. S. Bigelow to
Henry Cabot Lodge, June 20, 1916, Lodge Papers; Chicago _Tribune_, February 12,
1918. It seems clear that Roosevelt's decision to fight Adams and help Hays was a
last minute one, based on his enmity for Adams and the possibility which the "pro-
German" evidence gave for getting rid of Adams. Theodore Roosevelt to Governor
James Goodrich, January 31, 1918, Roosevelt Papers; Longworth, _Crowded Hours_,
270-71.
Hays Elected Republican National Chairman

long time associate of both Roosevelt and old guard leaders who were opposed to Adams' faction, to Hays to help him win the election as chairman. If Hays could not win, King was instructed to work with him to elect someone else—but not to elect Adams. King went to the St. Louis meeting as Roosevelt's representative and also as Hays'.

On February 7, Perkins gathered the Progressive party leaders still loyal to him on his private railroad car in New York and set off for the national committee meeting in St. Louis to elect Hays chairman of the national committee. Perkins went as the representative of Republican progressives and, he thought, with Roosevelt's full backing and as his personal representative.

Neither Hays nor New went to St. Louis. Perkins, King, Hert, and Governor Goodrich were to handle Hays' affairs. And Hays could write that he was not taking "any hand in the St. Louis matter at all—just letting it 'ramble.'" He did not think "there is a thing in it," but he mentioned that "some of the boys are going . . . just to see the show."

The show was brief, but impressive. On February 11, the day before the full national committee convened, the executive committee met. Senator William Calder of New York, representing the New York national committeeman who was in the army in France, read Adams' "pro-German" letters and articles from the Iowa papers to the executive committee in Adams' presence. "Needless to say," Calder reported, "it caused a terrible shock." The men supporting Adams on the committee, including Hemenway, "were so overwhelmed they could not speak." Adams himself "could not seem to understand that in view of the fact that we were at war with Germany, his attitude previously rendered him unavailable."

Perkins had given Calder the information to present to the executive committee. With it, he had recommended that Calder tell the full national committee that if Adams did not drop out, Calder would denounce him and all who voted for him on the Senate floor. Adams was also to resign as vice chairman. Whether or not Calder made the threat, Perkins was able to report that Adams was "unquestionably eliminated" and that "harmony and a satisfactory result" would be obtained in the national committee.

When the full national committee met the next day, confusion was rife. According to the Chicago Tribune rumors had become public that Adams was going to withdraw from the race for the chairmanship. These reports brought an outraged public denial from the vice chairman: "Having failed

39 Theodore Roosevelt to Will Hays, February 6, 1918, Hays Papers; Roosevelt to John King, February 5, 1918, Roosevelt Papers.
40 Perkins took with him Walter Brown; John Shaffer; progressive boss Alexander Moore of Pittsburgh; Frank Hitchcock, Taft's postmaster general and still a considerable power in the old guard; and National Committeeman Hynicka of Ohio. They were met in St. Louis by A. T. Hert and R. B. Howell. George W. Perkins to Walter Brown, February 6, 7, 1918; James R. Garfield to Perkins, February 6, 1918; Perkins to Harold L. Ickes, February 5, 1918; Ickes to Perkins, February 6, 1918, Perkins Papers.
41 Will Hays to Charles A. Carlisle, February 8, 1918, Hays Papers.
42 George W. Perkins to progressive leaders, February 16, 1918; Perkins to William A. White, February 21, 1918, Perkins Papers; William M. Calder to Herbert Parsons, February 18, 1918, Parsons Papers; Chicago Tribune, February 11, 1918.
43 George W. Perkins to William M. Calder, February 12, 1918; Perkins to John C. Shaffer, February 12, 1918, Perkins Papers.
in every other effort to dictate the organization of the Republican Party," Adams said to reporters, "George W. Perkins has undertaken to cast doubts upon my Americanism." Perkins made no public comment, but, the Tribune was careful to report: "the men closest to Colonel Roosevelt declined to permit Perkins to speak for them." Roosevelt had no intention of publicly alienating Adams or anyone in the regular organization.44

Perkins was also attacked by the one other Bull Moose leader at the meeting. Ickes was disturbed at Perkins' busy negotiations. He was trying to get a chairman who was satisfactory to himself and, so far as Ickes knew, to Roosevelt. But he seemed to be making no effort to get any power for the progressives, either on the national committee or anywhere else in the Republican organization. When the executive committee initially voted to continue the old campaign advisory committee of 1916, it became obvious to Ickes that the progressives were scheduled to remain powerless advisors.

Ickes held a news conference and demanded "actual, not ornamental" recognition for the progressives. He said that the progressives of the west, whom he represented, were quite willing to "enter an amalgamation" with the Republican party if the conditions of that amalgamation were the disposal "simultaneously of . . . the old guard remnants and of Perkins and the Progressive Party" headquarters group. Ickes doubted that such a deal would be made, but he warned that the western progressives did not intend to accept less.45

On February 13, the national committee met for the second day. By that time it had been made clear to Adams that he was "unavailable" for the chairmanship. He nominated Hays, who was elected. Adams remained vice chairman of the national committee, and only the vaguest reasons for his withdrawal from the contest for the chairmanship were reported in the press. But there was a price for Adams' cooperation. He refused to withdraw from the race until he was assured by "members of the Old Guard" that "George W. Perkins and his fellow-Progressives would be eliminated from active participation in the councils of the Republican Party." Adams demanded that Hays be neutral about the 1920 nomination; that the national committee elect the powerful executive committee of the party instead of allowing the chairman to appoint it, as was usual; and finally that the national committee abolish the old campaign advisory committee on which the progressives were scheduled to continue to sit. Hays agreed to remain "neutral" about the 1920 nomination, and the advisory committee was abolished. The appointment of a new executive committee, however, was left in Hays' hands. Adams bowed to the inevitable, and Hays was elected without opposition.46

Perkins, Roosevelt, New, and Hays all got what they wanted from the

44 Chicago Tribune, February 12, 1918.
45 New York Times, February 12, 1918; Chicago Tribune, February 12, 1918.
national committee meeting: Perkins a demonstration of progressive influence, Roosevelt a neutral chairman, New the election of Hays, and Hays the chairmanship. But the expense, for some of them, had been great. Perkins, for instance, was virtually eliminated from politics.

The morning after his election, Hays was warned by New that powerful old guard members of the Senate had said that it would "not do to recognize George Perkins." Perkins received no office, nor any public recognition, in the Republican organization from the new chairman. At the same time Hays worked with Perkins privately and consulted him frequently about political matters. Occasionally he did favors for Perkins. At Perkins' request he agreed, for example, shortly after his election to prevent Ickes from getting any posts in the Republican organization. Ickes' ultimate recognition as a valuable progressive Republican leader would have to come from a Democratic president.47

Hays' election gave Roosevelt the occasion to get rid of Perkins. And Perkins gave Roosevelt the excuse. Shortly after the battle for the chairmanship, Perkins, in a fury, sent an article from a New York paper to Roosevelt which said that King was Roosevelt's "mouthpiece" and that Perkins had been eliminated. Perkins was vituperative about King and demanded that Roosevelt not see him again. Roosevelt replied, from his hospital bed, quite bluntly that "nobody is my mouthpiece" and that he would see anyone he wanted any time he wanted. He made it clear to Perkins that he no longer represented him and that he was, indeed, no longer needed at all.48

This was, for Roosevelt, the final act of cutting free of the Progressive party he had created. He had made sure, in the years between 1914 and 1918, that the Bull Moose had died and that most of its membership had returned to the Republican party. He had vigorously renewed his old friendships among the regular Republican leaders. He had avoided contact with the western progressive group and denied it any encouragement for a battle with the old guard or any sort of demonstration of progressive strength and unity. He had, by using King and Perkins, obtained the election of a Republican national chairman who was not inimical to his nomination to the presidency, without alienating the old guard leaders.49 Now he got rid of Perkins, who had alienated the old guard. It is ironic that this act of preparation for the 1920 Republican nomination was performed from a hospital bed. Although he recovered and left the hospital on this occasion, a year later, in January, 1919, he again entered the hospital, where, quite unexpectedly (he delighted in doing the unexpected) he died.

Hays' election, combined with Perkins' elimination and Roosevelt's efforts

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47 Harry S. New to Will Hays, February 14, 1918, Hays Papers; Hays to George Perkins, February 13, 1918; John W. McGrath to Perkins, February, 1918; John C. Shaffer to Perkins, February, 1918; Perkins to Chester Rowell, February 19, 1918, Perkins Papers; Hays, Memoirs, 158-59.

48 George W. Perkins to Theodore Roosevelt, February 18, 1918; Perkins to Walter F. Brown, February 18, 1918; Perkins to Will Hays, February 18, 1918; Roosevelt to Perkins, February 18, 1918, Perkins Papers; New York World, February 18, 1918.

to gain the 1920 Republican nomination, left the western progressives particularly isolated. It had been the war and "Americanism" and the issue of Adams' loyalty that had defeated the old guard, not any strength the progressives had. "The old guard would have elected Adams," one of them wrote, "had the Progressives not proven that he had pro-German views." The Republican national committee was still "decidedly reactionary." The progressives, now that the campaign advisory committee was done away with, had no voice in Republican affairs at all. It was clear that the old guard would try to remove Hays as soon as they possibly could; then nothing would have been gained by the progressives at all.\textsuperscript{50} In 1921, when Hays resigned to become Harding's postmaster general, Adams was elected Republican national chairman.

Hays' election obscured the issues between the progressives and the old guard and paved the way for new issues and new leaders in the Republican party in the twenties. Hays' techniques of working quietly behind the scenes, favoring no particular group but trying to work with all, and organizing all factions on a large and public scale to work for election victories for the Republican party made the obscurity thicker. He was neither progressive nor old guard. He was indeed the man Perkins had specified, who could "harmonize" and "organize." His work was cut out for him. He had the congressional campaign of 1918 to organize, and then the massive preparations necessary for the presidential campaign of 1920. Prevented by the national committee from placing progressives on a campaign advisory committee, he brought more than a hundred prominent progressive and regular leaders into harmony by having them work together on a huge platform advisory committee prior to the 1920 convention. The Republican party won control of the Congress in November, 1918, and Harding won the presidency by a landslide in 1920—ample justification for the election of Hays.\textsuperscript{51}

After his election, Hays, still in Indianapolis, was deluged with congratulations, advice, and requests for positions. His first move was to go "east" to Washington to confer with all the prominent Republican leaders, both progressive and regular. Ignoring Roosevelt's request that he tell only Roosevelt and King when he was coming, he went publicly and openly to be feted in Washington and to be accepted enthusiastically by virtually all the factions in the Republican party.\textsuperscript{52} It must have been a relief, as New wrote to him "now that all the . . . complications are out of the way," to go to Washington "without disguises—right into the Union Depot for that matter," leaving his "false whiskers" and his "Ham Lewis' wig" in Indiana.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} O. H. P. Shelley to George W. Perkins, February 21, 1918, Perkins Papers.
\textsuperscript{51} Hays' activities in the 1918 campaign are well covered in Seward W. Livermore, Politics Is Adjourned: Woodrow Wilson and the War Congress, 1916-1918 (Middletown, Conn., 1966), 106 ff.; his activities in 1920 are discussed in Wesley M. Bagby, The Road to Normalcy: The Presidential Campaign and Election of 1920 (Baltimore, 1962).
\textsuperscript{52} Harry S. New to Will Hays, February 14, 1918; Fred H. Lyons to Hays, February 14, 1918; Theodore Roosevelt to Hays, February 16, 1918, Hays Papers; Hiram W. Johnson to Meyer Lissner, March 15, 1918, Hiram W. Johnson Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley; John W. Weeks to George W. Perkins, February 20, 1918, Perkins Papers; Harold L. Ickes to Gifford Pinchot, February 18, 1918, Pinchot Papers; New York Times, March 2, 1918.
\textsuperscript{53} Harry S. New to Will Hays, February 14, 1918, Hays Papers.