

## THE ALSO-RAN

### Interpreting the 1928 Outcome

After taking his wife and family aside to tell them how the presidential vote was going, Al Smith went to bed on election night in 1928 knowing that his bid for the White House had failed. As the campaign had progressed Smith had come to expect this result, but now he seemed stunned by how thoroughly the voters had rejected him. Within a day or so, the full extent of his defeat was known. Nearly 21,400,000 persons had voted for Herbert Hoover, while only about 15,016,000 had opted for Smith. This translated into 444 Electoral College votes for the Republican ticket and just 87 for the Democratic standard-bearers – 49 fewer than the 136 electoral votes John W. Davis had garnered four years earlier. This lopsided outcome, and also the sizeable margin of Hoover's victory in the popular vote (58.8% to 41.2% of the two-party vote) qualified as a landslide in the Republican's favor.

The totals also confirmed that the 1928 presidential election had aroused a high degree of interest and participation in the country. The voter registration, which was not far below the record number, had increased considerably from 1924 (it went from just over half of the eligible voters in that year to over three-quarters of those eligible in 1928); nearly 37,000,000 persons in all had voted for a presidential nominee on November 6, 1928.<sup>1</sup>

Especially noticeable was the increased turnout in the Northeast, where there had been

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<sup>1</sup> In 1928, the turnout for Congressional races (nationally) lagged behind that for the presidential contest the most of any presidential election year between 1880 and 1948, which would seem consistent with a sharply elevated interest in the presidential race.

the greatest declines in 1920 and 1924.<sup>2</sup> The causes and effects of this higher voter participation were not immediately clear to those who were reading the returns. Was it mainly attributable to the increase in the country's population since 1920? Had more women voted in 1928 than in 1920 and 1924, the first two opportunities all American women had to cast ballots? Had the bulk of the new voters – men or women – preferred the Republicans or the Democrats in 1928? Would the first-time voters that year continue to take part in future presidential elections?

On the face of it, the strategy the Democratic Party had devised at the outset of the presidential campaign had failed. The party's renowned "Solid South" had been reduced in 1928 to only five states in the deepest South, plus the vice-presidential nominee's home state (Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina); Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia had all defected to the Republicans after having voted for Davis in 1924. The Midwest, seemingly ripe for at least some defections in 1928, had instead remained entirely loyal to the G.O.P. In the Northeast, Smith's apparent deep suit, only Massachusetts and Rhode Island had given him their electoral votes: even his home state of New York had gone to Hoover because Smith's downstate totals could not overcome Hoover's votes elsewhere in the state. Finally, Smith's reliance on his unique personality had not turned the tide and secured his victory. Although his showing in the popular vote was significantly better than that of Davis (who had received just 28.9% of the three-party vote in 1924), it was still a

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<sup>2</sup> Later, the 1928 increase would be viewed as part of a multi-election trend evident that could be detected earlier in the 1920s in some areas and that extended into the following decade.

disappointment – especially as Hoover’s share of the total popular vote had also significantly bettered that of his predecessor, Calvin Coolidge, in 1924.

What had gone wrong for Smith? Pundits and politicians alike, as always eager to make sense of the results and to second-guess the candidates’ strategies and mistakes, studied the 1928 returns and offered their analyses of the election’s outcome. As with any election, there were disagreements about what the results showed, as well as about how well the parties and their nominees had done in the recent contest. In 1928, moreover, analysts of elections had little in the way of statistical data and tools. There were no scientific polling techniques and no exit interviews. Information about the characteristics of voting districts and their populations remained rudimentary at best, and there were no computers to assist in manipulating data. With no subsequent elections to add perspective to the one just concluded, long-term trends of which the 1928 presidential contest would in time be a part could only be guessed at. Numerous local variations also complicated the picture for those commenting on the results as they saw them. All of this made unraveling exactly why Hoover won and Smith lost in 1928 somewhat problematic.

Making sense today of the contemporary *analyses*, therefore, is somewhat chancy and remains essentially an impressionistic exercise. “Unfortunately for the historian,” as one historian wrote, “elections are not run as experiments in the social sciences.” Support for almost any interpretation – and contradictory opinions about almost every potential causal factor in 1928 – can be found in the words of those who were looking back on

what was for them the recent election.<sup>3</sup> (Later scholars, with much more in the way of data and tools available to them, have continued to disagree on the particulars of how and why Smith lost.) It is possible, though, to discern a broad contemporary consensus about many aspects of what had been decided on November 6, 1928. There are few surprises in the analyses that emerged soon after the election, and generally speaking they still seem close to the target.

Throughout the South, there had been more Democratic defections than almost anyone had expected, except perhaps for the most fervent anti-Smith leaders. The combination of Smith's wetness, Catholicism, urbanism, and Tammany Hall membership had (it was thought) proved to be insurmountable hurdles for many Southern voters. It seemed likely that Arkansas would have been among the losses had it not been for the presence of Senator Robinson on the national ticket. Some analysts wondered if Southerners might have resented the apparent attitude of the Democratic headquarters in New York that the region could be taken for granted in 1928. Certainly Smith had offered little to attract Southern voters, except perhaps the prospect of development of water power in the region. Even his efforts to address the issue of farm relief had been focused on the states that produced wheat and corn, rather than the ones where cotton was still a major crop.

Some astute commentators also pointed to changes in the South's economy and demography as a factor. Hoover had done well in many areas where urbanization, industrialization, and the influx of Yankee newcomers might have tipped the balance in his favor; in this "new New South," the Republicans presumably had greater appeal than

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<sup>3</sup> A good example can be found in the commentaries that ascribed motivations to men and women voters.

the Democrats did. In several states – Virginia and North Carolina, for example – there were already strong Republican state parties that were competitive with the Democrats, so it did not take many more votes to produce a plurality for Hoover. Given this changed economy in parts of the South, perhaps one Smith opponent was correct when he asserted before the election that a good many Democrats had been just waiting for “a justifiable excuse to vote the Republican ticket.” In retrospect, the 1928 election represented one more step along the arc from a solid Democratic South before 1920 to a nearly solid Republican South later in the 20th century. Contemporary observers of course could not know that, but some of them suspected that troubled times were coming for the Democratic Party in the South. After all, as one writer put it, “Bolting is like kissing. Once done, it is a habit.”

Particularly interesting was the agreement among most observers that had it not been for the Democratic Party’s sometimes-desperate appeals to party loyalty, and to the race issue in general, Smith might have lost in the South even more badly than he did. The New York World was among the first to notice a correlation in Southern states between the vote for Smith and the proportions of blacks and white inhabitants: Smith generally did better in counties where the former constituted 50% or more of the population. The post-election analyses concluded from this correlation that in these areas white voters did not feel that they could abandon their traditional party, even if Al Smith were the Democratic nominee, whereas in counties where whites were safely in the majority they felt that they could vote their instincts on such issues as prohibition and Smith’s Roman Catholicism. Of 191 counties with black majorities, 184 went for Smith; conversely, of

226 counties with black populations below 5% of the total, Smith won only 79 (and 21 of these were in the home state of his running mate, Robinson). The issue that would dominate Southern politics during the next several decades thus seems to have played an important role already in 1928.

As for the Midwest, the consensus was that voters here had shared the South's concerns about Smith – his urban outlook, his wetness, and his religious affiliation, but these apprehensions were less pronounced and less decisive than they were below Mason and Dixon's Line. Although Peek's Smith Independent Organizations Committee had done heroic work in a short time to acquaint the farm states with Smith and his views, it had not always worked smoothly with the existing Democratic parties. But what had really mattered in the Midwest, it was generally agreed, was this: too few farmers and their progressive or liberal allies had been persuaded that Smith understood, cared about, or would bring relief to the agrarian states, or that he envisioned an agenda to address the concerns progressives and liberals held dear. Given what they saw as his other liabilities, voters in farm areas were not willing to take a chance on Smith even though they dearly wanted economic relief. His vagueness on the controversial McNary-Haugen proposal – and his failing to develop his own distinctive alternative for agricultural relief – had left the farm states with no choice but to hope that the Republicans would come through for them.

Moreover, although some farm leaders had come out for Smith, there had had no prominent, dynamic champion among them: had Lowden or Borah supported him in

1928, the story might have turned out differently. In contrast, Hoover had enjoyed a wealth of support from both Republican politicians and farm leaders, along with the region's opinion-leaders and press. And surely it was not lost upon farmers and their friends that the co-sponsors of the McNary-Haugen Plan, both Republicans, did not support Smith in 1928, (though Representative Gilbert N. Haugen did not actually endorse Hoover, either).

As it had turned out, therefore, the deeply rooted Republican party loyalty among the party's rank and file in the Midwest (farmers and residents of more urbanized areas alike) had proved too much for Smith and his party to overcome. It would take much more to make these voters cast their ballots for a Democratic presidential nominee. While recognizing this reality, some commentators pointed out that Smith had in fact made noteworthy inroads in the traditional Republican pluralities: the Democrats had registered higher gains over their 1924 support than the G.O.P. had over theirs, significantly cutting the margin that the majority party enjoyed. The ball was now in the victors' court, many observers noted, and if depression conditions continued in the Midwest and the Republicans failed to bring relief, the discontent there would only grow.

As for the hope of the Democrats that Smith would attract the remnants of the strong support that Senator Robert M. LaFollette had attracted in Midwestern farm regions during the three-way 1924 presidential campaign, there was little evidence to work with. It was no consensus about how the voters for LaFollette in 1924 had divided four years later, when the contest was between Smith and Hoover. It did seem to many observers –

including the Senator's son – that Smith had gotten a significant portion of those votes, since in some of the erstwhile LaFollette states he had garnered more than double the popular vote that Davis had been given in 1924. Nevertheless, Smith had still fallen short of riding Progressive votes to victory in the midwest, and his failure to win even in Wisconsin, LaFollette's own state – and a wet stronghold besides, was particularly disappointing to the Democrats.<sup>4</sup>

Northeastern areas, particularly urban centers, had on the whole responded quite positively to Smith, it was apparent to the commentators, and there had then been a larger-than-usual Democratic vote in these areas. Here, it seemed obvious to them, Smith had received much support among from those in low-income, Catholic, and polyglot ethnic enclaves. But shows of enthusiasm (whether for Smith or for the return of beer, it had not always been clear during the 1928 campaign) had not often enough transferred into Democratic votes: although Smith had benefited almost everywhere from increases over the vote for Davis in 1924, the response to him in the Northeast on November 6 still fell below what was needed to wean most of that populous region away from the G.O.P. This was not surprising when voters worried that continued prosperity might be at risk if they forsook the incumbent Republicans for the untried Democrats, who offered no real alternative. To most observers, the election simply confirmed that the Northeastern states remained content with the status quo.

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<sup>4</sup> Another factor hurting Smith in the Midwest, particularly in Illinois but even beyond its borders, might have been the loss through death on August 8 of the state's long-time Democratic chieftain and Smith ally, George E. Brennan.

Smith's performance in his home state drew special notice in the aftermath of the election. Here, disaffection within the Democratic Party (certainly in Queens, and perhaps even within Tammany Hall, where dislike and jealousy of Smith were not unknown) may have cost him enough votes to cost him the state as well.<sup>5</sup> Those analysts who studied the returns in detail discovered another interesting facet about how Republicans in New York had voted in 1928, compared to how they had voted in Smith's several gubernatorial elections, both in presidential years and otherwise. Savvy observers of New York politics pointed out that Smith had generally enjoyed sizeable Republican support when he ran for governor but that in 1928 much of this support seemed to have leaked away to Hoover. In the eyes of many Republicans in the state, it seemed, what was good for New York was not necessarily good for the United States.

Thus the many contemporary observers offered in their surveys, articles, and correspondence after the election their judgments about how and why the three prongs of the Democratic Party's strategy had been broken or blunted in electoral combat with the Republicans. The Democrat Party's failure in any one of the three important geographic areas the prongs were meant to capture for Smith might have been enough to lose him the presidential election (in fact, he probably had needed substantial support in each of these areas in order to win in 1928), but failing in *all three* of them made Smith's situation hopeless.

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<sup>5</sup> There were also suspicions and allegations that Frank Hague, the Democratic boss of New Jersey, had knifed Smith there in 1928.

Various organizational and tactical shortcomings had compounded the strategic miscalculations to seal the defeat for the Democrats. A number of states were probably lost causes from the outset because their party structures had atrophied during the 1920s. Raskob's management approach was unsuited (as he himself probably was) for the situation at hand, and the party's national leadership did not do enough to build support for the ticket from top to bottom in each state. They did not seem to know enough about state and local problems and concerns, let alone do an effective job coordinating with the campaigns that the rank-and-file party members were involved in. Smith himself almost never even mentioned – even in New York – the local or state Democratic candidates whose names would appear with his on the ballot on November 6.<sup>6</sup> Thus the party's headquarters had been guilty of, in one critic's pithy summary, “more noise than work.” When these serious problems were added to the customary ones of intrastate divisions, jealousies, factionalism, and jockeying for future advantage (problems found among the Republicans as well, of course, but more likely to damage a party that could not afford to squander any votes), the odds against Smith winning grew ever longer.

In addition, the nominee himself had taken some serious missteps before and during the campaign. Smith's telegram on prohibition to the Houston convention, followed by his selection of a wet, Catholic, Republican businessman as chairman, and then his proposals for changes in prohibition that went beyond the tenuous balance the party had reached in writing its platform, got the Democratic campaign off to a shaky start. His decision to

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<sup>6</sup> In at least one instance, in Massachusetts, Smith did not know who was running for the U.S. Senate on the same ballot in November. It should be pointed out, of course, that many state and local Democratic candidates were all too happy to put some distance between themselves and their national standard-bearer; indeed, many of them ran what were in effect independent campaigns in 1928 or apparently cut deals with the Republicans in order to save their own skins.

delay the kick-off of his campaign for nearly two weeks, until after Hoover had accepted the nomination; his inability to seize – and keep – the initiative; his inability to disguise his straddles on prohibition and farm relief more adroitly; his reluctance or inability to canvass the country more thoroughly than he did – all these also hurt him. Confined by his long experience in New York, untested in national politics, and unprepared by an easy nomination for the presidential campaign that followed, Al Smith had shown in 1928 that he was not yet ready for the major leagues of American politics.

When it came to the issues and factors that cut across regional lines in 1928 – mainly things associated with who Smith was and what he represented in the eyes of the electorate, there were some areas of consensus among contemporaries but also some notable disagreements. Foremost among these things, as one might expect, was Smith's religion. Never before had pundits and politicians had to assess the possible impact of a presidential candidate's Catholicism, which had made it something of a wild card in their analyses – just as it had been in the election itself. Their difficulty was increased by the fact that voters might have played this card either face up or face down, if they played it at all: not everyone would acknowledge that Smith's Catholicism was a significant issue in the election, and neither did those voters who were in fact influenced by it always admit (or even realize) that they had been affected by it.

On the other hand, there were many anti-Catholics and others who had openly opposed Smith because of his Catholicism, and they had hardly restrained their jubilation when he was beaten. Said one Methodist publication: “‘Sound the loud timbrel,’ from lakes to

sea, 'Jehovah hath triumphed, His people are free' from the menace of Al Smith, a wet recession with Uncle Sam as barkeeper à la the Canadian way, Tammany in the White House, and all the rest. Laus Deo! 'It was a glorious victory.'" As this statement indicates, Smith's religion remained tightly entwined with the prohibition issue in particular in the post-election analyses, where the connection between the two factors continued to spawn intense debate. Thus the central disagreement among contemporaries reviewing the 1928 election was (as it remains today) how having a Roman Catholic presidential nominee affected the outcome. The range of opinions on this issue is remarkably wide. Secondary complications involved Tammany Hall, often thought to be overwhelmingly Catholic in composition, and Smith's heritage among relatively recent immigrants to the United States, many of whom were Catholics.

For those who did conclude that Smith's religion (either taken by itself or, more typically, linked to prohibition or something else) had played a role in 1928, the post-election consensus seemed to be that on balance it had hurt him, though he might well have lost to Hoover anyhow; the degree to which it had harmed his chances for victory from area to area was another matter. There was almost universal concurrence that the nominee's Catholicism cost him the most in the South: only here, for instance, did newspapers consistently identify religion as a major factor in the outcome. Whether religion had been enough to make the difference in the Southern states that Hoover had captured remained a matter for debate, however. As for the Midwest, contemporaries also seemed agreed that opposition to Smith's religious affiliation here had been less prevalent or significant than in the South – few of them would credit the issue with swinging any

Midwestern states to Hoover. Only in the Northeast, the observers also concurred, had Smith's Catholicism meant a net gain for him – perhaps enough of one to have brought two states, Massachusetts and Rhode Island, over to the Democrats.<sup>7</sup>

A good many commentators, though, argued that Smith's views on prohibition – not his religion affiliation – was his real liability in 1928. They contended that his oft-repeated proposal for the modification of national prohibition was the principal *issue* that had lost him votes throughout the country. Dry leaders, naturally, encouraged such thinking. As one scholar has put it succinctly: “Hoover was ‘sound’ on liquor; Smith was not. For many a voter the issue was as simple as that.” (Those who held the view that Smith's wetness was the main causal factor in his defeat had just as much trouble untangling prohibition and religion, of course, as those who were trying to place the principal blame on religion rather than on prohibition.) There is no doubt that the defense of prohibition was at times in 1928 merely a “polite veneer” to cover religious bigotry. But the persisting and widespread support for national prohibition – despite its inadequacies – was real and should not be discounted as a factor in Smith's defeat; the only question left unanswered is just how close it was related to the religious issue for many voters. Some observers deftly resolved the conundrum by pointing out that for many voters the paired factors were themselves actually part of two larger wholes: the mindset of many dries and

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<sup>7</sup> It was commonly assumed that Smith's candidacy had drawn to him not only many of fellow Roman Catholics but also numerous members of groups that had often been victimized by persecution – chiefly blacks and Jews. Whether or not this is so, it is clear that Smith attracted some persons – often political or social liberals – who supported him principally because he was being attacked on religious grounds by what one of them termed the “Protestant plutocracy.” When it came to how women had divided in 1928, a lively topic that year, there was no post-election consensus at all.

Protestants, on the one hand, and on the other the complex bundle of attributes and identities that Al Smith the nominee had presented to the voters in 1928.

Within that bundle, as we have seen, were such things as Smith's ethnic origins, his urban upbringing, and his affiliation with Tammany Hall. These interrelated and self-reinforcing characteristics had made the election just concluded seem like an epic battle of cultures – sometimes Protestant and Catholic, other times rural and urban – to those perceptive observers who could step back from the details of Smith the nominee. There is considerable merit to insisting upon this unity of attributes as a factor in his defeat. The fact is that from the beginning of his career in national politics through the 1928 election Smith was never a one-dimensional candidate or nominee: the totality of what he represented was indeed larger than the sum of the parts of which it was made. Although certain aspects might attract or repel more than others, in the final analysis it was his entire persona that truly mattered – including in the apogee of that career, Smith's run for the presidency.<sup>8</sup>

What seems somewhat surprising today about the post-election analyses is their seeming preoccupation with the impact of religion and prohibition. Although most commentators (even Bishop Cannon) also acknowledged the importance that the climate of national prosperity had in determining the outcome, few of them went deeper and attributed the outcome to what is so obvious today: Hoover had won because he was a Republican in a

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<sup>8</sup> A number of conventional political issues occasionally received mention in the post-election analyses, but none of them seemed to be regarded as significant factors in the outcome. These included water power, labor injunctions, the tariff, and even foreign policy. One scholar who has focused on the labor movement has concluded that labor involvement in the 1928 election and the effect of the labor vote that year were negligible.

country where his party was far and away the majority and where habitual party affiliation was still a very powerful force. In order to compete, the Democrats had sought to minimize certain policy differences with the majority party and to plead that they would do the nation's economic situation no harm, but with prosperity (or the prospect of future prosperity) so widespread, the country's contentment and trust in the Republican Party remained unshaken. Without an economic downturn, an incompetent G.O.P. nominee, or a dynamic issue to energize the electorate, then, Smith was doomed to defeat in 1928 – there was no reason for most voters to switch parties.<sup>9</sup> So, as one periodical had predicted two years before presidential campaign began, the Democrats had appeared to many voters “simply as the Outs who want to get in.”

Perhaps this basic fact of political life in 1928 was so fundamental that it did not need to be explored in any depth, or perhaps contemporaries had grown so accustomed to having a Republican majority that they took it for granted. But the continued dominance of the G.O.P. also lacked the freshness and intrinsic mystery of such potential causal factors as Smith's religion and wetness, which probably would sell more newspapers and periodicals. This was not the first – and would not be the last – defeat to have been attributed to such matters rather than to the mundane facts of political life. In actuality, although the Republicans' majority-party status and other advantages had set the stage nicely for their victory on November 6, 1928, in the final analysis the election had

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<sup>9</sup> Will Rogers, as usual, had it figured out correctly. In response to a comment that Smith could be elected if he changed his religion and turned Protestant, Rogers replied “...I think it would do more good if he would keep his religion and turn Republican...” Raskob, though he blamed anti-Catholicism for some of the vote against Smith, also recognized that “the Democrats could not have won the last election against an administration that had credited to it the greatest record of prosperity the world has ever known.”

actually turned on even more basic factors: the importance of personality in politics and whether or not the American people were willing to accept Smith as their president.

This helps to explain what had become of Smith's supposed trump card, his distinctive background and personal appeal. This last element – the lynchpin, in fact – of the Democratic strategy had in actuality succeeded all too well: Smith had indeed made himself the central issue – perhaps, in fact, the only “burning” issue – of the campaign for the White House in 1928. But doing so had not swung the election to Al Smith, as he and his friends had hoped. In fact, it probably had been a key factor in his defeat. (There is the making of a rich irony here. Might Smith have been better off to have shown himself *more* rather than less in 1928? Expanding his exposure to the voters might have overcome some of their initial hesitations about him and made them more comfortable with him.)

In the first place, Smith's emphasis on his personality and attributes had drawn attention away from his quite-commendable record as governor. Combined with the Democratic Party's decision to blur its differences with the reigning Republicans in 1928, along with Smith's failure to offer much in the way of specifics about what he would do in office, voters had no clear conception of what a Smith presidency would stand for and seek to achieve. Unfortunately, Smith lacked the vision to see his opportunity in 1928 to attract those who might find in him a way of advancing their own interests – women, intellectuals, minority-group members, and liberals; instead, he presented himself as

someone who had merited promotion to the highest office in the land because of his good service as governor.

In addition, the heightened emphasis on Smith as a person had allowed his numerous determined enemies to focus public attention during the campaign on the more controversial aspects of his personal baggage – principally his religion, but other aspects as well. The more Smith presented himself as the main issue in 1928, the more he compelled voters to be either for him or against him – “as if,” one insightful commentator said, “Smith were running for President by himself and the question were whether to make Smith President or not to give the Presidency to anybody.”

In the final analysis, too many Americans decided (during if not before the campaign) that they did not want a man like Smith to be their president. Christian Century perhaps summed up their attitudes for them when it concluded: “Doubtless a great many people felt a warm response to Smith’s personality, were moved by the story of his rise from lowly origins, sympathized with his lack of early educational opportunities, and genuinely liked him, yet preferred to commit the responsibilities of the highest office to a man with a different type of personality.” Thus whether they were not ready to see a Roman Catholic in the White House, or did not like the idea of having a somewhat brassy and strange-sounding New Yorker as the country’s leader, or did not trust someone who had risen from an ethnic neighborhood by being loyal to the most notorious political machine in the country, or thought that Smith lacked the “refinement and broader vision” that the occupant of the presidential chair ought to have, Americans did not take to Smith

as well as he had hoped they would. In modern terms, he had too many “negatives” for them. These people might have been somewhat hesitant about Smith the man before he was nominated, but they had not made a final decision; by emphasizing himself during the campaign, Smith had unknowingly fed fuel to their doubts and turned them against him.

Even as he had relied so heavily upon his personality to sway the voters he need to win, Smith had retained his deep faith – held throughout his career – that he would (and should) be fairly judged on his merits – that he would be accepted for what he was and had accomplished in New York. He confidently believed the 19th-century rhetoric about how one became president. He had a naïve, simplistic, and old-fashioned view that “the people” would weigh the nominees’ records and then select the man with the better one. The irony is that during the 1928 campaign Smith was actually compelling voters to accept or reject him for what he *was*, not for what he had *done*.

Thus both Smith and his enemies had shared a goal (albeit with much different outcomes in mind): to make the voters in 1928 decide whether or not to elect *Smith*, rather than have them decide between the two parties’ nominees. This had been the Democratic Party’s own dilemma between the Madison Square Garden convention in 1924 and the Houston convention in 1928 – the choice was reduced to Smith or not Smith. Without a plausible alternative within the party during the later half of the decade, the Democrats eventually had concluded that they must give Smith his chance at the presidential

nomination once and for all in 1928. Within the party, there simply had been no plausible choice other than him.

But during the 1928 presidential election, the situation was far different: those voters who, reduced to giving either thumbs up or thumbs down on Al Smith, decided they could not accept him did have an alternative now. What was worse for Smith and the Democrats, this alternative, Herbert Hoover, had considerable noteworthy merits and attractions in his own right. Hoover might have outpolled Smith in any event in November 1928, but Smith's decision to emphasize (even exaggerate) his personality had the unhappy effect of driving some potential supporters to the Republican. It was, as one astute observer of Smith and his times later wrote, "Smith's affectation, rather than his religion, [that] had lost him the Presidency in 1928."

It was Smith's misfortune, then, to have had to run against Herbert Hoover during the closing months of the country's post-war flirtation with widening prosperity and expanding self-confidence. For where the New Yorker had assets in his life and career, Hoover could top them; where Smith had real or perceived weaknesses, Hoover had compelling strengths; where Smith had earned genuine respect for what he had done on the political stage, Hoover had won plaudits for his successes on many other stages besides; and where Smith was economically and politically a man of the past and present but culturally a man of the future, Hoover was economically and politically a man of the future but culturally a man of the past.

Smith had risen impressively from an inauspicious beginning through his diligence, pluck, and hard work. Hoover had experienced the same sort of rise, but his was even more impressive on several counts because he was an orphan who had worked his way through prestigious Stanford University before amassing a personal fortune. While Smith had been practicing his political skills, loyally toiling for his superiors and slowly ascending the ranks of the Tammany machine, Hoover had been practicing his engineering skills with altogether different types of machines around the world, making an international name for himself in business and obeying his own principles rather than calls for mere party regularity. While Smith had been learning – and then pulling – the ropes in state politics, Hoover had been lending his expertise to his country’s national government, first as a wartime administrator for Woodrow Wilson and then as a leading economic advisor to Presidents Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. While Smith was encountering questions about his long involvement with Tammany Hall, Hoover was encountering none about the scandals involving Cabinet members with whom he had served.

Then, while Smith’s colorful image, flashy appearance, and kinetic energy were commanding attention during the 1928 campaign, Hoover’s solid respectability, unflinching decorum, and dignified manner were commanding admiration.<sup>10</sup> While Smith was

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<sup>10</sup> One dry author summed up the difference between Smith and Hoover by describing the kind of people who attended a pro-Hoover meeting in a California church as follows: “In the audience there was not a down-and-outer, a millionaire, a brewer, a distiller, a bootlegger or a gangster. There was not a proprietor of a gambling establishment, a brothel, or a speakeasy, or a member of a gang of organized criminals. There was not an office-seeker, a ward heeler or a political boss. There were simply intelligent, successful, high-minded and patriotic business and professional men and women. Their responses showed that they were seething with indignation at the threat to American traditions and ideals involved in the possibility of Mr. Smith’s election.” Stereotyping aside, the description does paint a good picture of those who could not see Smith – and his friends – at the head of their government.

conducting a vigorous challenge to the reigning party, Hoover was conducting himself as the confident (almost smug) heir-apparent who would ascend to leadership as soon as the formalities had been gone through. And while Smith and his friends were feeling obliged to defend the nominee's unpretentious and retiring wife against slurs and snickering, Hoover and his friends were feeling pleased by the many compliments that engaging and attractive Lou Hoover was receiving.

Moreover, Hoover had much more going for him; indeed, he seemed to have it all. His pastoral background – the stuff of myths – was counterbalanced by his advanced education, cultured sophistication, distinguished achievement, and world-wide experience in the mining business. (Hoover had no whiff of the working class about him, as Smith did.) Hoover had first come to national attention through his relief work under the Democrat Wilson during the World War, but he had then made his fame by bringing his engineering expertise to bear on the problems of government under two Republican presidents. (Hoover had no trace of provincialism or the mean underside of politics about him, as Smith did.) Now that he had turned his skills to government, Hoover was a national figure who had already begun to eclipse Coolidge. (Hoover was bigger than his party, which turned to him in great hope, not his resigned party's only possible candidate, as Smith was.) “The American people,” Outlook said in a perceptive article, “have a conception of the Presidential office to which Hoover seemed fitted.”

What made Hoover all the more (perhaps uniquely) fitting for his time, however, was his extraordinary fusion of a rural upbringing and traditional values, on the one hand, and a

cosmopolitan perspective and business acumen, on the other. At a time when the United States sensed itself being wrenched out of a mentality that gloried in an isolated, agrarian simplicity, turning in an unsettlingly quick fashion into the complex, urban, industrial (and military) colossus that would soon stand astride the world, Hoover offered himself as a perfect bridge between these two ways of life. For those feeling themselves increasingly drawn toward urban, modern America, with its uncertain future, but also still feeling the weakening cling of their roots in the soil of a rural, old-fashioned America with three centuries of history, Hoover presented himself as someone who could successfully span that widening gap. In his personal history, his personal experiences, and his personal capabilities he enabled Americans to have it both ways at a time when the anxiety of accelerating change was in the air. Hoover's personality, therefore, trumped what Smith regarded as his own trump card.

In these pre-Crash days, then, Hoover seemed to be a new kind of political leader, an "industrial statesman" – a technician who could make the machinery of government work with the orderliness and efficiency that this progressive modern age seemed to worship. Admired for his steadfast commitment to orthodoxy and the status quo, he was nevertheless also admired by many liberals for his humanitarian instincts and independence of mind. Even Hoover's dry recitals of figures, references to data, rather colorless personality, and unruffled monotone on the radio served to remind Americans that they now had the opportunity to hire a seasoned professional and "omni-competent" expert, rather than a typical old-school politician, to manage their national government. Thus Herbert Hoover was the perfect candidate for a satisfied nation that believed that it

had attained a permanent pinnacle of progress. His image was one in harmony with America's buoyant and optimistic self-image. The belief that Hoover would simply keep the country humming along, perhaps tinkering a bit with its machinery to improve its efficiency, made him powerfully attractive. Running against Herbert Hoover, given the country's state of mind, Smith did not have a chance.

Would *any* Democrat have had a chance in 1928? After all, the Democratic Party was a struggling minority facing a well-entrenched incumbent establishment. It was less well-organized, it was uncompetitive in too many states, it had within recent memory demonstrated just how anemic it was, in 1920 and (especially) in 1924, and it enjoyed fewer dependable sources of revenue than the Republicans. In addition, times were generally good (despite the pockets of poverty, the distress of agricultural areas, and the systemic weaknesses that the collapse on Wall Street would soon expose), and there was no powerful tide of discontent that Smith – or any other Democrat – could have ridden to victory. The presence of an exceptionally attractive Republican at the head of the opposition's ticket had almost guaranteed that the majority party would register yet another victory in 1928, perhaps despite some losses here and there. In retrospect, only the magnitude of Hoover's victory seemed to be at issue.

As a matter of fact, most Democrats had recognized at least from 1924 forward precisely what they would likely be up against in 1928: this was why they thought they could afford to nominate Smith, give him his chance to win the White House, and then move on after 1928. The scenario had played out now out just as many of them had expected,

therefore, and although it was too bad that the party would have to wait another four years to challenge the Republicans for the presidency again, at least the slate would be a clean one as the 1932 presidential contest began to shape up. In a curious way, those Democrats who had argued that Smith would do better in 1928 than any other man the party could have nominated were also proven correct, but in the aftermath of disaster few – least of all Al Smith himself – could take much solace in that small gleam of good news.

### **Smith in Transition**

For decades to come, scholars and others would continue to explore and debate the nature and causes of Smith's defeat in 1928. They too would scrutinize, and sometimes give emphasis to one or another of the causal factors that contemporaries had called attention to – primarily Smith's religion and wetness, along with his heavy burden of having been a minority-party nominee in what then appeared to be prosperous times. They too would be interested in such details of the 1928 presidential election as the role that race had played in Southern states; how many new voters Smith had attracted, particularly in the cities, and from what groups they had come; and whether his candidacy had served as a transfer station for the progressives and liberals who had voted for LaFollette in 1924 and would soon become a core element of the Democratic Party.

Increasingly, though, these later scholars would interest themselves in two other factors that had typically been lost in the pack when contemporaries handicapped the field of

issues in 1928: Smith's ethnicity and appeal to urban voters. Many published studies argued that Smith had attracted those of foreign white stock or that his support in urban areas (not just the major cities) had risen dramatically in 1928. In addition, with evidence all around them of how the New Deal had so thoroughly transformed the American political landscape during the 1930s and 1940s, later students of the 1928 presidential election strove to answer a pressing new question as well: had that election been a "critical election" that produced or at least presaged the seismic political shift in party loyalties and behavior that would begin so soon thereafter? Thus the 1928 election has continued to live on as a rich source for historical analysis and scholarship.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Scholars began to examine and explain the 1928 election even before writers in the popular press had finished their wrap-up surveys. The earliest of these scholars also did not have the benefit of good demographic information or sophisticated analytical tools; as both of these gradually improved in quantity and quality, deeper and richer analyses became possible. As part of the new political history of the 1960s and afterwards, many scholars became enamored of complex statistical and demographic studies of voting districts and their possible correlations with voting behavior. Because of the limitations of the data about these districts in 1928, though, it seems rather unrealistic to expect that we can ever understand that year's presidential election as well as we do those that occurred during the second half of the 20th century; there is, in fact, a real risk of driving the explanations of the outcome in 1928 well beyond where the data can safely take us. In the end, the collection of factors that *really* explain Smith's defeat, and in what relative proportions they operated from place to place and from voter to voter, is a question for which there is no definitive answer. After all, although some causal factors can be inferred from the data, some of them are not measurable – voters are not automatons, after all. The best statistical analyses can suggest possible solutions to the puzzle we wish we could solve, but in the final analysis there is still plenty of room for informed interpretation.

Most early analysts tended to blame either religion or prohibition for Smith's defeat. The debate about the importance of these two factors has continued down to the present; neither time nor additional information has settled it, since the evidence is sometimes contradictory and the question is at bottom so susceptible to the student's personal values and frame of reference. Advocates for the former include Gosnell and Colman, Moore, Hobbs, Fair, and Lichtman; advocates for the latter include Ogburn and Talbot and Watson. As the text has suggested, however, not only was there an interaction of these two factors with one another but they were in many ways subsumed in much larger forces, ranging from Smith's unusual personality to the deep-seated clash between rural and urban cultures in America; this makes the question of which single factor defeated Smith (or, if one prefers, elected Hoover) ultimately irresolvable. Meanwhile, a lengthening perspective has enabled scholarship to focus as well on Smith's appeal to ethnic and urban voters, factors that many writers (McRae and Meldrum, Silva, Dahl, Degler, Allswang, and Burner, for instance) have come to advocate – either alone or, again, in combination – as the key factors in the 1928 outcome. Nor has the issue of prosperity in 1928 been ignored, beginning with Peel and Donnelly and continuing down through Lubell, Hofstadter, and Leuchtenburg. Surely in this instance, as in so many others in political analysis, one size does not fit all: it is likely that there were as many combinations of these many factors as there were voting booths, and we must resign ourselves to that.

A separate topic is the place that Smith's campaign in 1928 occupies on the continuum of American presidential elections during the 20th century. To put it succinctly, did Smith in defeat help to create the

But for Al Smith during the last days of 1928, all of this scholarly investigation and debate about causal factors and voting blocs and statistical correlations was far in the future and very distant from his mind – a mind, it should be said, that had little patience for or interest in such academic and conjectural discussions anyway. What was on that mind now was winding up his final term as New York’s chief executive, helping his successor become a successful governor, moving out of the Executive Mansion, and taking up a new career in private life. Besides, Smith was quite sure he knew what had defeated him – had he not seen it with his own eyes and heard it from those who took him aside on his campaign train to tell him the “real” reason why people were opposed to him?

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New Deal coalition that would bring the Democratic Party two decades of dominance in U.S. politics by being the first to attract many of that coalition’s elements to the party? Was 1928 in actuality a “critical election” in the realignment of American politics? The originator of this theory of critical elections was political scientist V.O. Key, Jr., author of a seminal 1955 article with that title. In his work, Key described a cyclical pattern in American politics featuring long periods of stability that are disrupted by sudden realignments – critical elections. (Subsequent scholars have broadened that to include critical eras.) Key saw three attributes of a critical election: it would have unusually high interest, it would mark a sharp departure from the pre-existing alignment, and the new alignment it brought would last for a considerable period of time. Immediately Key’s model (honed and popularized by others, especially Gerald Pomper) began to be used as a lens through which to re-examine the 1928 election, particularly at state and local levels ranging from Pittsburgh to New Mexico. It is fair to say that Key’s theory produced a lasting realignment of its own within political discourse – although recent criticism (by Allan J. Lichtman and John L. Shover in particular) has weakened the tight grip that critical election theory once held among students of American politics.

Looking at the possible application of critical election theory to the 1928 election, the results seem inconclusive, and even if the theory is generally accurate it certainly does not apply in every setting where it has been tested because there are so many variables. Differences within regions, states, and even cities make generalization difficult and risky: tight Republican machine control in Philadelphia cut into the vote totals for Smith among lower-class, ethnic, Catholics there; admiration for Hoover among Midwest Germans because of his post-war relief work in Germany increased his vote totals there. The present consensus seems to be that Smith’s campaign in that year may have started the process of realignment but that it took the Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt to consummate it. Certainly the level of interest was high in 1928, and many of the returns that year are consistent with Roosevelt’s four years later, but Smith’s election would seem to have faltered in the second attribute – it was by itself hardly a sharp departure from the pre-existing alignment. In addition, the continuity between the nature of Smith’s support in 1928 and that of Roosevelt’s later on is far from exact. Fortunately, our subject is Al Smith’s career in national politics and not the minutiae or the historiography of the 1928 presidential election, and so we can leave the discussions summarized above to the experts.

The very magnitude of his overwhelming defeat, along with the distribution of the votes across the country, had confirmed for Smith that his Roman Catholicism – so central to his life, and to his self-image – had been the major barrier to his election. Because of it, the American voters had personally rejected *him*. “In its broad aspect,” he would soon write in his autobiography, “the campaign appeared to me to be one of Smith or anti-Smith.” He could think of no reason for this rejection other than his religion. Indeed, for Smith his Catholicism was not just a factor in his loss, but in actuality the only one that would have brought him such a crushing one.<sup>12</sup> “I see things differently to what I did before Election Day,” he told an Albany acquaintance.

Defeat alone had not been entirely a shock to Smith, but he was not prepared for its overwhelming nature – and the way the election returns seemed to underscore the savagery and bigotry that he had been exposed to as the nominee. Despite his encounter with Charles Marshall in 1927, when the presidential campaign opened Smith was still rather naïve about bigotry. One price of the 1928 campaign had been his innocence: now he was saddened, hurt to the quick, and not a little bitter.<sup>13</sup> Very conscious of his symbolic role – the first person of his background to have been a contender for the presidency, Smith was also quite aware that a defeat attributed in large part to his Catholicism could set a precedent that might govern the country for a century. All this

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<sup>12</sup> Hoover, on the other hand, later attributed his victory in 1928 to the climate of prosperity, the two candidates’ differing positions on prohibition, the farm issue, Smith’s Tammany connections, and his opponent’s “association with Socialists.” Hoover did allow that the religious issue might have helped him in four or five Southern states, but even there he thought that prohibition and Tammany Hall were major factors. In Hoover’s opinion, had Smith been a Protestant he might have lost by an even larger margin, since the Democrat had won the preponderance of the Catholic votes throughout the country.

<sup>13</sup> His bitterness was not directed at Hoover, with whom he would have a cordial meeting in Miami in February 1929.

was so very different from 1920, when he had been (barely) swept under by a Republican flood in which he had been a rather small fish. It was different from his years in New York politics, in which defeats were temporary setbacks and not permanent, crushing failures. Nor did tactical defeats in his own state, inflicted for political advantage by men – most of them personal friends but political foes – he could later laugh and joke and smoke cigars with compare to this one in 1928, which reflected such personal hatred for Smith and his kind. Anonymous letters filled with venom had even been sent to his three-year-old grandson! No, this was a wound from which he would not easily recover.

Smith's estrangement from the foreign world beyond the Hudson was now complete, but it was also galling to him that his own state – the state that had so strongly supported him in the past – had also rejected his bid for the presidency. A simple, unsophisticated man at bottom, Al Smith could not get past the deep hurt that the defeat in 1928 had inflicted. Robert Moses was one of many friends who believed that Smith was “never quite the same” after his defeat in 1928. Some of those friends – principally Belle Moskowitz, his closest confidante, shared and reinforced Smith's view of what had happened, which caused his sore to fester. So did members of his family. It would be years before Smith could refer to his loss with any humor at all, and even then the humor was weak.

As Smith simmered in these feelings, he began to view himself as something as a martyr to religion freedom and toleration, an attitude that though it continued to remind him of his pain may also have lifted his spirits somewhat. He told his Albany friend: “A religious war is the worst sort of war there is. There might have been one.” In this frame

of mind, Smith must have recited to himself many times his favorite oration, a reply of the Irish patriot Richard L. Shiel to Lord Queensbury in the British House of Commons. Queensbury had described the Irish as “aliens in race, aliens in country and aliens in religion.” Smith was particularly fond of Shiel’s description of the role of the Irish within Great Britain: “Partakers in every peril, in the glory are we not to be permitted to participate? And shall we be told as a requital that we are estranged from the noble country for whose salvation our life blood was poured out?” No doubt Smith, who surely identified with the Irish, felt that kind of estrangement.

The final days of the presidential campaign had been difficult for Smith – several important addresses crowded into a few days, tension within the Democratic headquarters in the General Motors Building (some of it due to Smith’s own short temper and penchant for fault-finding), and then the agony of the disappointing defeat. Perhaps this is what led him to announce, just three days after the election, that he would never again run for public office. Instead, Smith said, he would be content to serve as a “high private in the ranks.” The press reported that some of his close advisors had been opposed to his withdrawal from politics, in their hope that he might be nominated again in 1932, but for Smith this seemed the right step: he had had enough. With this announcement off his chest, he could soon head south with some pals for a two-week golfing vacation in the warmth of Biloxi, Mississippi. He would return recharged and ready to help his friend Franklin D. Roosevelt prepare to take up the reins in Albany that Smith would, perhaps a bit reluctantly, hand over to his successor on January 1, 1929.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> That state’s legislature had invited Smith to move to Mississippi, but most assuredly he was not looking for a new home – only some rest and relaxation. Smith did not choose the location for political reasons: it

Before he left on that vacation, though, Smith, as the party's titular leader, had some final duties to attend to. First he was to deliver a radio address to the American people, on November 13 – intended, he said, to cheer his followers. Striking a conciliatory and even philosophical tone, and using a quiet and cultured voice that many listeners must have found surprising, Smith stated that the Democratic Party would survive this disappointing defeat as it had so many others and emphasized reasons why it should feel encouraged by the outcome. Manipulating the election returns as losers sometimes do, he pointed out that small changes in both the popular and the electoral vote would actually have brought Smith and his party victory in 1928. He called upon the Democrats to be a “vigorous and intelligent minority” in the years to come, to continue as the liberal and progressive political voice of the nation, and to offer constructive criticism to the ruling majority – but also to develop and present in Washington, D.C., its own constructive program. While advising his listeners to give Hoover a chance, Smith also reminded them of the principles that the Democratic Party believed in – and that he would continue to battle for. Thanking that party for the honor they had given him – but not repeating his avowal not to run again – he pledged his “unceasing interest and concern with public affairs and the well-being of the American people.” The next morning it was off to Biloxi by way of Washington, D.C., Georgia, and Florida. With an additional stop in Alabama en route home again, Smith would spend two weeks in the region where so recently he had been so controversial.

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had simply been the warmest place in the United States on the day he decided to get away for a time and was looking for a place to go. Roosevelt, resting in Georgia after his campaign, invited Smith to stop at Warm Springs on his way back from Mississippi, but Smith did not accept the invitation.

The votes had hardly been tallied before there were calls for Smith to run again in 1932, but most observers had wanted to write him off as a possible candidate even before he made his announcement. After all, Smith's overwhelming defeat ("A repudiation from which no recovery was possible," Rexford G. Tugwell called it) seemed to be definitive on that point. That he had promptly removed himself as a potential candidate of course helped to clarify the Democrats' outlook for 1932; in particular, this "friendly and generous" act would be good news for Roosevelt, whose narrow victory in Smith's own state (akin to Smith's narrow loss in 1920 and victory in 1924) caught the attention of many who followed politics. As the governor of the nation's most populous state, Roosevelt would be almost automatically considered a contender for the 1932 nomination anyway, and now with Smith's retirement any potential opponents of the new New York governor would not have the former governor's banner to rally behind.

Smith's farewell radio address was also well-received. "The irony of the campaign," one writer said, "is that Al Smith delivered his finest and sweetest campaign speech after election." As for Smith's call for the party (presumably through its national committee) to take a more active role than ever before in presenting and defending a program in Washington, D.C., there were doubts – doubts that the party would do it, and doubts that it should. That Chairman Raskob, who had indicated his intention to remain at the helm for the next four years, would presumably be involved in this process alarmed a number of Democrats.<sup>15</sup> They were even more alarmed when Raskob spoke of plans to hold a conference in February 1929 in order to chart the party's new course. Opposition

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<sup>15</sup> Smith stated in May 1932 that Raskob had asked for opinions about whether he should resign. The consensus, Smith said, was that he should remain chairman, and Raskob agreed only if he would be able to make the national committee an active body.

defused this sudden threat to party unity, which reflected the scars of 1928 but anticipated the battles that would surely precede the 1932 contest.<sup>16</sup> Raskob tried again in April 1929, again unsuccessfully, to organize a conference (ostensibly on finances) that would include Smith, Robinson, Peter Gerry, Harry Hawes, Pat Harrison, Robert F. Wagner, Key Pittman – and Herbert Lehman, Roosevelt’s second-in-command.

Somewhat surprisingly, Smith was back in the radio studio again three days after his “farewell” address. This time, he was accomplishing another chore of the titular leader of the party: he was endeavoring to raise money to pay off its campaign debt of about \$1,600,000. Smith had actually intended to make an appeal for funds in his first address, it seemed, but the talk on the 13th had been devoted to policy instead – possibly because Raskob and others had detected stirrings of intraparty unrest with the leadership that had brought the Democrats to defeat in 1928. In second talk Smith declared that he had been offered “flattering” sums for a collection of his campaign speeches but that he had decided to contribute his addresses to enable the Democratic National Committee to publish them and sell copies for \$2 each as a way of drawing down the party’s debts. Again Smith called for that committee to do more than act as a party of opposition by using an expanded publicity mechanism in order to mobilize Democrats all over the country. This was not entirely a novel suggestion, but with these two addresses Smith had certainly given impetus to the idea of having his party retain a presence in politics between presidential elections. It was an idea that Raskob was quite willing to implement, not only because it made sense to his business-oriented mind but because

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<sup>16</sup> At about this time Raskob also told the National Committee he was willing to resign as chairman, but if he did so the body declined his offer.

with the Democratic contingents in the House and Senate dominated by those unfriendly to Smith and his supporters the National Committee was the only vehicle available to them.<sup>17</sup>

Smith's appeal brought in, in the end, about \$200,000 and sold thousands of copies of his addresses. Although Smith had been silent on his future in his second radio address, his listeners might have wondered a bit about his plans – especially in light of his remarks about what he had termed the “all-important” issue of prohibition. This could be an ominous sign that Smith and Raskob might not have taken the former's defeat in 1928 as a permanent defeat of their hopes for modifying national prohibition. There was sure to be resistance to this on the part of other Democrats – not only dry ones but those who wanted intraparty harmony to prevail. There was also the matter, particularly in the South, of how to handle the Democrats – leaders and rank and file alike – who had bolted the party in 1928 because of Smith's nomination. State parties would have to address this issue before the primaries for upcoming elections (as early as November 1929) were held.

By now it was clear, therefore, that the months ahead would not be peaceful ones for the Democrats at the national level, and by spring the struggle for power within the party might break into the open. Already some members of the party had doubted that the principles Smith had said Raskob and the organization he was heading should promote more vigorously were the same principles they themselves believed in. Suspicious of where he and Smith might be taking them, they were calling for Raskob's resignation or

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<sup>17</sup> Smith was not the first to recommend that the Democratic Party maintain an office between presidential elections: Clem Shaver, the chairman in 1924, had done the same after that year's election.

sacking. Some outside the party were echoing these calls for fresh leadership. Nation, for instance, was sure there were plenty of able Democrat leaders in the country “ready to shake out for a new deal” – and mentioned Roosevelt as one of them. In this connection, some observers might have regarded the new New York governor’s reluctance to hail Smith as the party’s titular leader (“Oh, well, we won’t discuss that,” was all he would say when asked about the matter) as an somewhat ominous symptom of possible trouble ahead.

As the sound and fury of the presidential campaign began to fade away, and with political combat delayed for a few months, the usual in-depth analyses of the election’s outcome began to be published for the benefit of political hot-stove league enthusiasts. While the Republicans took quiet comfort in their victory, the Democrats (like Smith himself) could take some consolation in the size of their minority vote and the enthusiasm Smith had developed – especially among new groups in cities in the Northeast but elsewhere as well. He might indeed have given the party its best chance in 1928. As one veteran commentator summed it up toward the end of the campaign, “It may be thought . . . that if the Democrats had nominated a Protestant they would have had a better chance, but this is not true. It is Smith who has caused these eastern and western states to waver; no one else could have done it. The nomination of any other man who was mentioned would have insured an easy, comfortable campaign like that of 1924.”

Even the partial fracture of the Solid South in 1928 might have beneficial consequences, some observers suggested: knowledge that the region could not be taken for granted any

more could both make the Democratic Party more accountable there and give the South more leverage within the national party's future deliberations. At the same time, the partial fracture within many of the Democratic state parties in the South in 1928 would likely have serious consequences as the loyalists sought to punish those who had broken ranks. But they might also turn their eyes northward, to the Democratic National Committee and its chairman, in an effort to ensure that in the future the party would nominate persons more palatable to the South.

Less overtly political retrospectives also appeared as 1928 turned into 1929. As Smith's career in national politics seemed to have come to an end and he was returning to New York and apparent retirement, many observers took this opportunity to salute him and wish him well. Smith received some good marks for having made the presidential campaign "lively, interesting, and educating," in the words of Nation, which added him to its "Honor Roll for 1928." Smith was even considered for the annual Woodrow Wilson Award, an idea that initially shocked Roosevelt (who was involved in the process for selecting a recipient); his somewhat tepid response to the suggestion may have been enough to spike it, for no Wilson Award was given in 1928.

The role that the religious issue played in ending Smith's national political career in defeat continued to preoccupy these retrospectives. Many commentators expressed regret that the issue of Smith's Catholicism had arisen at all, let alone played any part in determining the 1928 outcome. Others, though, took solace in thinking that what Felix Frankfurter called the "healthy catharsis" of an open discussion of the religious issue in

politics would ultimately prove to have been a step forward. This discussion had produced a surer knowledge of Catholic beliefs, at least among those who had had open minds on the matter, and the country might now be seeing a renewed commitment to religious tolerance from which everyone would benefit; more practically, the evidence seemed to indicate that interest in and conversions to the Roman Catholic Church had sharply increased in many areas.<sup>18</sup>

Not all Roman Catholics adopted this sanguine attitude. Some of them remembered that many non-Catholics had not had open minds in 1928, and surely the campaign had reflected or even resulted in renewed prejudice and bigotry, too. Some Catholics seemed eager to vindicate Smith, perhaps as early as 1932; others retreated into bitterness and despair, which in time evolved into what one later writer described as a stance of “organized assertion and aggression.” And now that Smith had lost “the religious question” was taking on a new dimension. Would another Catholic be given the chance anytime soon? If so, could he win? Whatever had in fact decided the 1928 presidential campaign, Smith’s candidacy (as he had feared) certainly had not disproved the long-held notion that a barrier stood between a Roman Catholic and the highest office in the land; indeed, it seemed agreed, his crushing defeat – as Smith had feared – might well discourage either party from nominating another Catholic any time soon. A discussion that would continue at least until 1960 had begun.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> When the Great Depression struck, some Catholics also were thankful that a co-religionist had not been in the White House to have the blame pinned on him.

<sup>19</sup> By 1950s there was growing doubt that the informal barrier to a Catholic president was a real hindrance, but it took John F. Kennedy to prove that it no longer existed. Some insightful scholars have suggested that the repressed frustration and sense of inferiority of Catholics (and the Irish, too) after 1928 expressed itself in such things as the Christian Front, isolationism, McCarthyism, and, in general, opposition to Roosevelt’s New Deal. (The phenomenon of Father Charles Coughlin and his appeal as well, perhaps.) As a matter of

Although Smith no doubt read these retrospectives with some interest, he had work to do. He was not the only one to assume that he would remain involved in politics somehow back in New York after 1928 – he was, after all, only 54 years old at this point in his life, but at first it was not entirely clear which end of the Hudson River would capture his interest. As soon as the election returns were known, speculation began about whether Smith would focus his attention on New York City, where its mayor, his old colleague James J. (Jimmy) Walker, was increasingly getting himself into difficulty and where Tammany Hall seemed to be floundering under its current leader, George W. Olvany. Might Smith make a run for mayor in 1929? Or might he seek to succeed Olvany at the organization’s new clubhouse on 17th Street? Most of Smith’s friends regarded such speculation about his possible involvement in New York City politics as idle talk; what he might do on the New York *State* level was another matter, however. Smith himself had said publicly that he would never take himself out of politics and would undertake “any civic duty” for his state, but for now, he insisted, his focus was on getting Roosevelt ready to assume the governorship.

The role Smith imagined for himself before and especially during Roosevelt’s upcoming first gubernatorial administration has been the subject of considerable debate. This is not surprising in light of the how the relationship between the two men subsequently deteriorated and the impact of this circumstance on Roosevelt’s ascension to the presidency, followed by Smith’s eventual opposition to and public break with his

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fact, another presumed barrier had been challenged in 1928: Robinson had been the first true Southerner nominated by a major party since the Civil War.

successor. Many acquaintances of both men recorded their memories of how this relationship evolved, first during the month or two following Smith's defeat (and Roosevelt's narrow election victory) on November 6, 1928, and then as Roosevelt's governorship took on the character that it did. These memories do not always agree, but the general outlines of how the two men related and responded to one another during this time period seem clear.

Smith had had no natural successor as governor. To win New York in the presidential election in 1928, he realized, he would need a strong gubernatorial nominee on the ballot – especially one who could draw votes upstate, which was heavily Republican. In addition, Smith wanted to ensure that the program he had battled for during his years as governor would be both protected and extended. Smith would clearly have the main voice in determining a gubernatorial candidate, who would be chosen at the Democrats' state convention in Rochester in early October (Smith would stop here upon his return from his swing through the Midwest). But other party leaders would have to be content with his choice, who might serve as their governor for the next two years at least. Smith was, after all, a lame duck in New York in 1928.

Smith pondered a number of potential candidates, including Robert Wagner (who had been elected New York's junior senator in 1926), businessman Owen Young (who unfortunately did not share Smith's views on the important issue of water power and ultimately declined to run), and Herbert Lehman (a wealthy financier who was highly respected within the party); Smith's personal own favorite for awhile seemed to be Judge

Townsend Scudder, but he was not widely known throughout the state and Smith found him to be anything but warm personally.<sup>20</sup> Another possible candidate was Franklin D. Roosevelt, with whom Smith by 1928 had been associated for nearly twenty years: the two men had served in the state legislature together, and Roosevelt had placed Smith's name in nomination in 1924 and again in 1928. Although the two men were certainly cordial with one another, they were not so much personal friends as political friends – men who shared many of the same goals and found it convenient to be allies in spite of their quite different backgrounds, approaches to politics, and personal natures. With Smith the senior politician in the New York Democratic Party during the 1920s and Roosevelt the willing collaborator, these basic differences were more potential than apparent.

Several times in 1928, it appears, Smith sounded Roosevelt out as to whether he would be willing to run for governor that fall; each time, Roosevelt refused to consider doing so. Roosevelt was an attractive candidate for Smith because he had many plusses as a potential candidate, including strong support among Smith's fellow Democrats. He was nationally known – he had been the party's vice-presidential nominee in 1920, and although he had never run for state-wide office in New York he was a prominent upstate Protestant who had no connection with Tammany Hall. (Indeed, early in his career Roosevelt had fought Tammany.) There were, though, two strikes against Roosevelt: he was limited, physically, by the poliomyelitis he had contracted during the early 1920s – and, largely because of this, he seemed determined not to run for governor in 1928.

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<sup>20</sup> Scudder and Roosevelt were the only Protestants among the viable candidates; Wagner was a Catholic, Lehman a Jew.

Roosevelt, who had long-term political ambitions, also believed that a defeat in 1928 would disrupt his plans to re-enter politics during the 1930s, perhaps after he had regained use of his legs.

Nevertheless, Smith finally decided that Roosevelt was the best choice: he was, in fact, the only candidate upon whom everyone could agree, and Smith viewed Roosevelt as sympathetic to his program and a good successor on that score. At a final meeting with state leaders on September 13, before Smith left for the Midwest, the Governor asked Edward J. Flynn, the Democratic leader in the Bronx and a trusted friend of both men, to work on persuading Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor (who was going to help in the national campaign's headquarters during the campaign) that he should accept the call to run. Later in the month, from his campaign stop in Milwaukee on September 29, Smith telephoned Roosevelt, who was then in Warm Springs, Georgia, where he had built a retreat where he could undergo intensive rehabilitation of his legs. Roosevelt declined, subsequently sending Smith a cable explaining that his health would not permit him to be a candidate in this particular year. Smith did not give up, however. Having arrived in Rochester, on October 1 he and the other party leaders settled on Roosevelt in a morning meeting in Smith's hotel suite. Smith and Raskob met with Eleanor Roosevelt to enlist her help, but she told Smith to talk to her husband. He did just that, making a final personal appeal to Roosevelt, who was still in Georgia.

Exactly what was going through both men's minds at this point is impossible to say, of course, but some surmises are possible from what we do know. Smith couched his

appeal in very personal terms indeed, emphasizing to Roosevelt in two separate calls how he needed Roosevelt on the ballot in order to win the presidency and in the governor's chair in order to continue the program they both believed in. He told Roosevelt it was his duty to run and promised to help him to govern. Roosevelt in reply repeated his conviction that if he could continue his rehabilitation process he could recover his health, and he also mentioned the mounting financial obligations (amounting to about a quarter of a million dollars) he had to the Warm Springs Foundation, which owned his Georgia retreat. Smith suggested to Roosevelt that he could be spared some of the hard work of the job if he had a good lieutenant governor – and Lehman, acceptable to both men, was the person who would serve in that post; Roosevelt might be able, Smith said, to spend a month or two in Georgia every winter.<sup>21</sup>

How much Smith thought Roosevelt would delegate to Lehman – and how much influence Smith thought he could wield through Lehman – are questions that cannot be answered. Raskob also told Roosevelt that he need not worry about any financial problems associated with the Foundation.<sup>22</sup> Roosevelt finally agreed to let his name be presented to the convention, indicating by his pregnant silence when Smith asked him if he would *refuse* to run that he would not, and the deed was done. The choice of Roosevelt was genuinely popular among New York Democrats, though there were wisps of criticism of Smith for putting his own interests before those of Roosevelt. Smith's

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<sup>21</sup> Smith himself had generally spent the middle part of the calendar year, when the legislature was not in session, in New York City.

<sup>22</sup> Raskob offered to lend Roosevelt the money he needed and even sent him a check; Roosevelt returned it, stating that Raskob's underwriting of the debt would be sufficient. Subsequently, Raskob did contribute considerably to the support of the Warm Springs Foundation, which was owned by Roosevelt's mother, but he had not completed his pledged payments by 1936. Irritation over this arrangement, including Raskob's delay and Roosevelt's failure to forward to him deeds to the property, lay behind the more overtly political disagreements between the two men that will be discussed later.

reply to this criticism was that “a Governor does not have to be an acrobat” and so would not need legs to run the state.

Out of this awkward situation, the two men carried different calculations of who had helped whom more. Both of them recognized that running for governor in 1928 was a considerable sacrifice for Roosevelt, whose dream of walking again might never be realized. Also, although Roosevelt had confidence in his ability to run a strong race in New York in that year, he (and his influential political advisor, Louis M. Howe) also recognized that a defeat then might effectively keep Roosevelt from fulfilling his larger political ambitions: after all, if he turned a deaf ear to the party’s need in 1928, he would have little hope of gaining its support in the future. But for Roosevelt the sacrifice was mostly the timing of the matter, not accepting the invitation, which gained him reentry into New York politics in a big way. Doubtless Roosevelt viewed the matter rather simply: not only had he loyally supported Smith during the last decade, lending him his own national reputation, but now in 1928 Roosevelt had done Smith the even larger favor of loyally agreeing to appear on the ticket for him. He then loyally campaigned for Smith in numerous stump speeches across the state during October and November (along with a few outside of New York) in which he spent more time talking about Smith than about his own candidacy for governor. In his own mind, Roosevelt surely thought that he owed Smith nothing after November 1928.

For Smith, the matter was more complex. He had gotten the kind of gubernatorial candidate he wanted, though not without some arm-twisting – not only of Roosevelt, who

had eventually succumbed to Smith's lobbying, but of the state's Democratic leaders: as Smith remembered the event in later years, he had had to persuade them to accept Roosevelt. (In fact, there was considerable support for Roosevelt among these leaders – especially those from upstate.) Thus Smith regarded himself as having salvaged the political career of a younger man who lacked a statewide reputation and did not have much in the way of political prospects. He expected all of his political friends to do what Roosevelt had done, both in years past and now: it was such a friend's duty to form ranks behind the leader, especially when personally invited to do so. Smith himself felt no particular obligation to Roosevelt now, except to continue to assist him.<sup>23</sup>

Looking ahead, Smith could foresee plenty of opportunities to provide that kind of assistance. From their first encounter many years earlier, Smith had always regarded Roosevelt as something of an amateur in politics – an aristocratic “visionary” who did not want to work very hard at the craft of governing and a man who was perhaps a bit weak and unreliable as well. Fortunately, Smith and his friends would be there to help Roosevelt: Smith had seen to it that the state government was reorganized, and so easier to run; moreover, Smith had put in place most of the top administration of the state, and his closest aides – Belle Moskowitz, Robert Moses, and others – would be there to help Roosevelt in carrying his predecessor's programs forward. These people, and Smith himself too now that he did not have to assume the presidency, would be available to protect Roosevelt from making any mistakes. He himself was prepared, Smith said, to

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<sup>23</sup> People who knew Smith well have commented that he had a tendency to expect his friends to do things for him, or at the least accepted their assistance, without necessarily feeling that he was obligated to reciprocate in kind. This tendency, not an uncommon one among prominent persons with big egos, may go a long way to explaining the diverging attitudes of Roosevelt and Smith after 1928.

come up to Albany from time to time to help Roosevelt by talking with people, working with the legislature, or negotiating on his behalf – after all, Smith owed it to the state and to his party to ensure that Roosevelt was a success, and Smith assumed that his successor would welcome the help. In sum, the two men owed one another, to some degree, but both had used the other for their own purposes. Most people would regard it as a fair trade, but the two principals evidently tallied things differently.

In the early days following his loss of the election, Smith spoke publicly about his Albany days coming to an end soon. He had no immediate plans to move back to New York City, however. (The Oliver Street area on the Lower East Side, the Smiths' family home for so long, had gone into decline between 1910 and 1920, and Smith and his wife had long regarded it as no place to raise their two daughters.<sup>24</sup> The house was cramped for the seven Smiths, too, and so he had moved everyone to the Biltmore Hotel before his second term began in 1923.) On December 1, the Albany newspapers reported that Smith had rented a suite in that city's DeWitt Clinton Hotel through sometime in January 1929, the length of their stay being dependent on Roosevelt's need for Smith's counsel. Ten days later, the newspapers reported that many of the family's belongings were being transported from the Executive Mansion to the hotel, where they would stay while the governor's official residence was being prepared for its new residents. Here Smith expected to hear from his successor, who, he assumed, would be interested in getting the departing governor's advice.

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<sup>24</sup> Lillian Wald had tried to interest Smith in helping to rebuild the Oliver Street area, but he had told her he had left his old house "because the roof leaked."

The calls did not come. Smith had to call Roosevelt in order to get the ball rolling, for they needed to confer about certain matters – primarily the state’s budget and legislative program, which could not be delayed, as well the latter’s key appointments. The two men would be able to handle the governmental details fairly easily, but the appointments were another thing. Meeting (at Smith’s request) for four hours at Roosevelt’s home on East 65th Street in New York City on December 14, Smith recommended to his successor the services of his right-hand aide, Belle Moskowitz, as his private secretary.<sup>25</sup> He mentioned that she was already at work on Roosevelt’s inaugural address. Roosevelt replied that he had already drafted his own remarks and promised to send them to Smith; he did not make a decision about hiring Moskowitz. (It was a sore point, later, that Roosevelt never did send Smith his draft remarks. In 1938, Roosevelt recalled that he meant to forward them but did not “find an opportunity to do so,” but it seems like that his forgetfulness was not entirely an accident.)

Eleanor Roosevelt, along with others, told her husband that if he did accept Smith’s closest advisor, who had a reputation for being both domineering and completely dedicated to Smith, he would never be able to make his administration completely his own. Roosevelt, habitually adverse to unpleasant confrontations and now eager not to offend Smith, was evasive with him. He wanted to build on Smith’s solid gubernatorial record, to be sure, but in ways that his predecessor did not anticipate – and might not approve of. More to the point, he needed to make his administration truly his own, for

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<sup>25</sup> Not to be confused with stenographer: the governor’s private secretary, in this instance, was the official’s key aide. Belle Moskowitz had assisted Smith without compensation, usually conferring with him in Albany weekly and of course by telephone more frequently; her livelihood came from her work as a public relations counselor in New York City.

his own self-respect. Besides, if he had any hopes of moving on to the national political stage, perhaps as early as 1932, he would have to show Democrats around the country, particularly those in the South and West who were unfriendly to Smith, that he was his own man and not a clone of – or stalking horse for – Al Smith.<sup>26</sup> And, to be quite hard-nosed about it, Roosevelt realized that if he decided to try for the Democrats' nomination in 1932 Smith was probably the only other man who might stand in his way, if he decided, after all, to seek the nomination again. Roosevelt no longer needed Smith for his own political advancement: what Roosevelt needed was for Smith to retire gracefully – and stay retired, while the two men continued a relationship that was friendly and even affectionate.

Thus the new governor's decision about whether or not to employ Belle Moskowitz as his own personal secretary was a critical one. Smith would renew his recommendation that Roosevelt make Moskowitz his secretary, both in person and through Frances Perkins, but Roosevelt delayed giving an answer and finally told Smith that he had had to appoint someone else in order to repay a favor.<sup>27</sup> To Smith, Roosevelt's inexplicable decision to deny himself the expertise and services of Moskowitz, who had managed the state's affairs so well under him, was both a terrible blunder and a stunning personal affront. According to those who knew him, Smith could not stop talking about the matter once he learned of Roosevelt's decision.

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<sup>26</sup> It also seems clear that the way in which Smith and his friends, particularly Raskob, had managed the 1928 presidential campaign (and had mismanaged McAdoo's possible endorsement), had given Roosevelt a new view of Smith. Roosevelt's cultivation of many Southern and Western Democrats who had not been Smith's supporters in 1928 must have reawakened his memories of the hostility he had attracted then.

<sup>27</sup> In the end Roosevelt appointed a virtual unknown named Guernsey Cross with the explanation that he needed a strong man to help him move about. Cross played little or no substantive role in Roosevelt's Administration.

Smith and Roosevelt had a similar discussion about Robert Moses, Smith's Secretary of State, who Smith thought Roosevelt ought to continue in that office because he, too, was indispensable. Moses and Roosevelt disliked each other intensely and had crossed swords before, and so Roosevelt was himself dead set against this idea – but did not want to offend Smith. When Smith persisted and eventually cornered Roosevelt on the matter, the latter this time directly refused because, he said, Moses “rubs me the wrong way.” Otherwise (to the surprise of some observers), Roosevelt would retain all of Smith's other department heads save one, who was probably jettisoned to disguise the fact that Moses was being dropped.<sup>28</sup> As they parted on December 14, Smith and Roosevelt agreed to meet again in a few days, but in fact they would not talk state business again in person until mid-January.<sup>29</sup> Roosevelt later remembered that, without any “premeditation or

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<sup>28</sup> Roosevelt appointed Flynn, the Bronx Democratic leader and an ally of Smith, as Secretary of State but never vested in that office much more than ceremonial duties. There were also hard feelings about another of Smith's existing cabinet members, Conservation Commissioner Alexander Macdonald, a Republican who had held the position since the administration of Governor Charles Evans Hughes. According to Smith's daughter, her father appealed to Roosevelt to keep Macdonald on so that he could qualify for a pension in a year or so and the incoming governor agreed to this, only to let Macdonald go soon (in favor of his friend and neighbor, Henry Morgenthau, Jr.) without informing Smith as he promised he would. From such things, she said, Smith eventually came to suspect that Roosevelt did not always act in good faith. In fact, Macdonald would get a pension in any case but had to serve through 1929 in order to qualify for the *maximum* annuity. At first it was believed that the Commissioner would retain his post through the calendar year in order to do so, but Roosevelt announced a successor to him (Charles D. Osborne) in early December 1929; Osborne was never confirmed and never served in the position, however. When Macdonald finally retired – on December 31, 1930 – Morgenthau did indeed succeed him. Upon Macdonald's departure from office, it was noted that he had been reappointed in 1929 to enable him to qualify for that annuity, so something had evidently changed Roosevelt's mind. Politics was certainly involved in all this, as members of his party had been lobbying Roosevelt to name a Democrat to the position. But there may be more than personalities and politics behind this incident, since the Conservation Commissioner's duties included overseeing the state's Water Power Commission, and Roosevelt wanted someone he could rely upon in the post because of the importance of this issue – about which he and Smith did not necessarily see eye to eye. See the discussion of the reforestation amendment below.

<sup>29</sup> Smith and Roosevelt had a brief telephone discussion of the state budget on December 22, a day when Smith was scheduled to visit Roosevelt's home at Hyde Park but remained in the capital owing to bad weather. Judging from one of Roosevelt's comments to Frances Perkins, Smith called Roosevelt repeatedly on other occasions during this time period in order to offer help or advice, but because no records exist for these calls we have no corroborating evidence to substantiate this.

action” by himself Smith had concluded there was no use in staying on in Albany and left for New York City a few days into January.

Smith indeed had gotten the message at their December 14 meeting, but he would be leaving Albany even sooner than that. Within days of his meeting with Roosevelt it became known that the soon-to-be-former governor and his family would depart the city before nightfall on January 1, inauguration day, and that the Smiths would be spending four to six weeks at the Biltmore Hotel in New York City before deciding upon their permanent home. On December 26, their belongings were shipped down the Hudson River. Smith said he would probably live where his wife wanted, on Park Avenue, rather than near some place such as Washington Square, but in April they did choose the latter location (51 Fifth Avenue), which Smith described as being aristocratic but yet democratic as well.

Smith was now beginning his last days in his “second home” of Albany, therefore. By late December, his essential fatalism had overcome his immediate disappointment and lasting bitterness at the results of the 1928 presidential election (though not the deeper pain, one suspects). Smith was telling his family and friends that his defeat was God’s will, and he repeated this sentiment at a dinner in Albany on December 30 (his fifty-fifth birthday); at this event, Smith stated that he had no regrets and was taking comfort in the phrase “Thy will be done.” Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that a spark of hurt and bitterness remained deep within Al Smith’s soul, where it waited for the oxygen of additional disappointments to fan it into flame.

But now, all Smith's focus was on the final farewells in Albany and Roosevelt's inaugural. Smith himself had overseen adaptations of the Executive Mansion to his successor's needs, including the addition of wheelchair ramps, and when the Roosevelts moved in on December 31 the Smiths were there to greet them. "A thousand welcomes," Smith said at the front door. "We've got the home fires burning and you'll find this is a fine place to live." Roosevelt replied, "I only wish Al were going to be right here for the next two years." At that, Smith and his wife walked out of the place that had been their home for six years and went to their hotel for their last night in Albany. A large piece of Smith's life was gone, and gone forever.

The next day, Smith would speak at the ceremony – as his outgoing predecessors had spoken at his inaugurations in 1919 and 1923. The inaugural event, held in the Assembly Chamber, was curiously more like a sentimental valedictory to Smith than a greeting to Roosevelt: shouts for Al were heard throughout. After the two men had entered, together, Smith talked about his achievements as governor but also praised Roosevelt and his mother. Roosevelt thanked and praised him in return, stating that he was Smith's disciple and would continue his predecessor's program. His address, however, did not detail how Roosevelt intended to do this – but dwelt instead primarily on rural issues. Smith reviewed the inaugural parade, said his last goodbyes to the Roosevelt at what was now their Executive Mansion, and then was gone from Albany within two hours.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Issues related to the Executive Mansion may have exacerbated the relationship between the Smiths and the Roosevelts. The building had to be extensively remodeled for the latter, especially in light of the new governor's needs, but one casualty was the Smiths' beloved zoo. In addition, the low-key Roosevelts apparently came to believe that their predecessors had enjoyed a somewhat ostentatious lifestyle.

Before long (on January 13), though, Smith was back in Albany, this time to resume his discussions with Roosevelt about programs and policies. According to Smith, what Roosevelt – conscious of his need to choose his new course “warily” – really wanted to talk about was how the two could mend fences. When Smith resisted this line of discussion, the meeting did not last beyond an hour.<sup>31</sup> He must have realized by now that the new administration in Albany would be charting a fresh course, both in state government and in party matters, and he decided that he would not offer any advice to Roosevelt unless he was asked to. Smith had never been in this situation before, and so he was quite unprepared when Roosevelt stealthfully and methodically began to undermine the governmental structure his predecessor had created – and along with it his remaining influence as well. Smith had thought the two men were on the same team, but suddenly he came to realize that he was not even in the game any more.

Signs of a divergence in party matters had emerged in early December, in fact, and soon Smith could see that Roosevelt was courting upstate Democrats in ways he had never used. (As a matter of fact, Smith had neglected the party in the counties west of the Hudson and had even traded votes for patronage with the Republicans who dominated in those counties.) When Roosevelt also revealed that he had canvassed as many as 3,000 Democrats<sup>32</sup> around the nation about the party’s political health and future, Smith must have realized that Roosevelt was in touch with a network of potential supporters far

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<sup>31</sup> Sometime during this sequence of meetings from November through January, Roosevelt (according to his later memory) “begged” Smith to go back on the Port Authority of New York, which Smith had helped to create; Smith declined, saying that he wanted six months free of any obligations.

<sup>32</sup> The number was actually closer to 1,000.

beyond any network that Smith had ever established, or thought to establish. Then, too, Smith could not have missed the implications of the reports he read on January 18, 1929, so soon after his radio address calling for the Democratic National Committee to undertake an expanded publicity campaign for the party's interest, that the New York Democratic Committee would be undertaking the same kind of thing in that state. Had Roosevelt had set his eyes on the presidency, perhaps as early as 1932?

Smith was not the only person who could read these signs, of course, and by now rumors of a difference of opinion between Smith and Roosevelt were surfacing. One issue was the cost of paying for the expanded publicity that the latter envisioned. At a state Democratic party meeting on March 8, the matter came to a head when Smith opposed the larger budget requested for the publicity campaign. Despite these private differences, though, the two men managed to keep on good terms in public. On March 11 Smith even sat in on one of his successor's frequent press conferences in Albany and engaged in some playful banter that amused everyone. In time, their relationship – now that the expectations of both men were more in harmony – might well have evolved into one in which Smith would provide occasional advice and support when invited, and Roosevelt would have benefited from that advice and support. Unfortunately, Smith had wanted to dominate the relationship, and Roosevelt, rightly, had refused to accept this.

In truth, the roles of the two men had now reversed. Although Smith did have some status, in both New York and the national party, as the titular leader, Roosevelt had the real power in New York and perhaps might exert that muscle within the national party as

well. Smith had no title, no office, and no authority. He was both hurt and surprised at the reversal of roles, and this may have made him overly sensitive to anything that seemed like a slight. According to those who knew him (some of whom, like Moskowitz and Moses, greatly distrusted Roosevelt themselves and aggravated Smith's feelings), Al Smith brooded on these things as the first months of his retirement slipped by.<sup>33</sup> As one scholar has put it well, Smith "stood glumly in the shadow of the reluctant champion he had helped to create."

Suddenly without the official responsibilities he had carried so gladly (and that – except for the occasional round of golf – had monopolized his life), and also without the audience before which he could describe and account for his actions, Smith was now a supernumerary instead of a lead actor on the stage of politics. His pride hurt by all these things – his overwhelming rejection by the voters, the personally painful reasons for his defeat, the melancholy end of "the Smith era" in Albany on December 31, his sudden detachment from the political world he knew and loved so well, and now his shabby

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<sup>33</sup> Louis M. Howe, Roosevelt's political advisor, had his own reasons for driving a wedge between his boss and Smith: Smith's circle had never recognized Howe's abilities. Many people who had aided Smith in New York (Lehman, Flynn, Samuel I. Rosenman, Frances Perkins and James A. Farley, to cite the primary examples) were caught between the two men as the rift began to emerge and grow. Most of them ultimately were drawn to Roosevelt, much as they might still admire Smith: after all, the new governor had both the power and the future in his hands now that Smith would not be running for president again. Roosevelt was wary of a few of them, particularly Lehman, whom he worried Smith might still try to use, but gradually the new governor captured their respect, their support, and typically their affections as well. Some of these mutual friends later related that they had talked with Smith before committing to Roosevelt, making sure that he would not be a candidate in 1932; Smith had indicated to them that he would not be running and had wished them well. (Not so, apparently, Smith's wife, who reportedly snubbed Farley when she saw him on account of his work for Roosevelt.) Others, outside New York, had similar conversations with Smith and learned that he did not intend to run. An Iowan whom Smith had lashed out at during the 1932 national convention, for instance, replied to him "I went down and saw you and talked to you and you told me you were not going to be a candidate, and then I came back and told [Farley] I'd go along with Roosevelt. So don't be blaming me and don't be blaming [him]." Smith reportedly believed that even those who had given pledges to others in the absence of his candidacy should withdraw those pledges and sign on with him instead.

treatment by his chosen successor – it would be surprising if Smith did not feel some resentment. And he would not have to look hard for a scapegoat, either.<sup>34</sup>

Not long after the election, according to a story related by Smith's acquaintance, the entertainer Eddie Dowling, the defeated nominee was invited to a celebratory dinner at the Lotos Club in New York City. Roosevelt was hosting the dinner in order to thank two dozen or so of those who had assisted in his successful gubernatorial campaign; Smith and Raskob were the only others present, according to Dowling. Roosevelt had included Smith to let him know he was not a forgotten man. Dowling remembered that Smith's sadness led him to find some privacy – in the men's room, in fact, where he released his emotions in tears. When Dowling found him there, Smith told him that he needed a job. At that point Raskob walked in, grasped the situation, and told Smith that he would have a job for life – a better one than the presidency, in fact. Smith, thinking his friend was joking, protested that he knew nothing of motors. Raskob replied that all Smith would have to do was sit in a 1,200-foot tower, meet celebrities, and sell office space. The plans would be announced soon, he said.

Whether or not these events happened exactly as Dowling said they did (there is nothing to corroborate his account, and the man was quite a storyteller), there can be little doubt that sometime in early 1929 Smith did receive from Raskob advance notice of the grand new building project, and, yes, the job for him that went with it. Together, the building

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<sup>34</sup> For his part, Roosevelt professed to feel no animosity toward Smith; to the contrary, he maintained that he always had fondness for his erstwhile mentor – whose photograph Roosevelt kept hanging in his bedroom in the Executive Mansion throughout his own term as governor. But Roosevelt felt a powerful impulse to do things his way, perhaps not only because of who he was but also because he had to prove himself physically capable every day of his life.

and the job would concentrate his attention for the next decade and more: Al Smith would preside not over the United States but over his beloved City of New York, all from a new Manhattan skyscraper – the tallest in the world – to be dubbed the “Empire State Building.” It was a match made in heaven.

Despite a modest state pension of \$8,000 a year, Smith in actuality seemed comfortable financially as he entered retirement in the first months of 1929. This was due in part to the generous subsidies he had received from Chadbourne through the 1920s but also to sizeable profits on stocks he owned, which Raskob evidently was managing for him.<sup>35</sup> But Smith still wanted to find something useful to do outside of politics – most likely in the business world, where he was determined to be a success. Early speculation had him accepting one of any number of possible positions, ranging from heading up a Wall Street bank to managing the New York Giants baseball team’s front office. Smith neither encouraged nor discouraged any of these ideas, which may or may not have had any substance to them. It was made known that he would soon be writing an article on New York for the Encyclopedia Britannica, difficult as that is may be to imagine (if he was, the article never appeared), and that he was preparing his autobiography, tentatively entitled Up to Now.<sup>36</sup> Smith also accepted invitations to join the boards of the Henry Street Settlement and of the County Trust Company, the bank being run by his friend, James J. Riordan.<sup>37</sup> Until the Empire State Building project was publicly announced later

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<sup>35</sup> Early in 1929, for example, Raskob transferred over \$139,000 in such profits to Smith.

<sup>36</sup> In any case, Belle Moskowitz would have done the writing for the article, just as she did most of it for the autobiography.

<sup>37</sup> The position with County Trust would have other ramifications for Smith later on. His having agreed to serve on the board, though, was another hint that that his political career was indeed over: he had refused to affiliate with any financial institution in 1921 and 1922, when he was between governorships, because he thought it would be improper for someone who might run again to do so.

in 1929 and work began on its site in midtown Manhattan, these other activities would vie for Smith's time with his need for some long-overdue rest after his more than thirty years in the political arena and the strenuous presidential campaign.

Neither having new interests nor wanting some time for relaxation meant that Al Smith would be fully relinquishing his role in political affairs, of course. At the state Democratic meeting in March 1929 at which he and Roosevelt had aired their differences about the latter's plan to expand the publicity campaign and its budget, Smith had objected to the proposal as the state party's titular leader – and Roosevelt had interrupted him to point out that *he* was now the titular leader of the New York Democrats. In retrospect, Smith probably had had to admit to himself that his successor as governor was correct, insofar as state politics was concerned; fortunately, though, both in his home city, where he had a status and voice within Tammany Hall that Roosevelt could never hope to have, and in the national Democratic party, where no one could deny his place of primacy for the next several years, there were plenty of developments in 1929 that would keep him involved in politics.<sup>38</sup> The situation at Tammany would be the first of those developments.

During Smith's governorship, particularly after 1924 when it was clear that Smith might have a future in national politics, many of Tammany Hall's district leaders – the keys to its continuing political success – had become restive under his leadership. Several factors

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<sup>38</sup> Smith did ask Roosevelt in September 1929 to let him comment on an appointment to the state bridge and tunnel commission; Roosevelt agreed and suggested the two men talk in mid-October. What became of this is not known. Despite what Smith thought, there were some in the Democratic Party who thought that he could hardly be considered a titular leader when he had been defeated so badly.

contributed to this. Some of them resented having to put on a good face so that Smith would look good to those around the country who hated Tammany and similar urban machines. Why, even in Houston, when one of their own was finally nominated for the presidency, Tammany delegates had had to celebrate without alcohol! There were also complaints that Smith had not been generous enough with the patronage and appointments on which Tammany and its district leaders depended.

For years, too, Smith had insisted on fighting those – primarily William Randolph Hearst and John F. Hylan – who were Tammany’s natural allies. Most of Smith’s closest advisors during the 1920s, too, were not Tammanyites but in fact “reformers” who had poorly disguised contempt for the machine – people like Moskowitz, Moses, and Proskauer. And then there were those who thought that Smith himself had gone “high hat,” aspiring to wealth and status in a way that marked him as different from most Tammanyites. (Smith’s announced plans for where he would live and with whom he would work when he came back to New York City in 1929 could hardly have helped this.)

The fact that in July 1924 Smith had forced through the choice someone he had preferred, Olvany, as head of Tammany only added to the resentment. Olvany was widely seen as weak and ineffective in addition to being Smith’s man, and his political ethics were, it would turn out, scarcely better than most of Tammany’s other leaders. At best Smith could command the loyalty of a large minority within Tammany Hall that believed that the machine could attract voters by following a course of idealism and reform; there were

others, though, who sneered at this notion – and at its champion, Al Smith. The insatiable district leaders had not been reformed: they had only been biding their time while Governor Smith and his picked leader, Olvany, had some leverage over them. Now, in 1929, things might well be different. Smith's own political future was clouded at best, particularly in national politics, and Tammany had less to fear from him because he had diminished clout in New York as well. And what had toeing the line Smith and his friends had drawn gotten Tammany, anyway? As one leader said the day after the presidential election: "Well, they kicked us in the face, didn't they? ...[T]he country thinks we're a lot of crooks and says there's no difference from the days of Tweed. So what's the use?"

Moreover, 1929 would see another mayoral election in New York City. The current mayor, Jimmy Walker, also owed his position in large part to Al Smith. Smith had befriended the young man and helped him to learn the legislative ropes in Albany earlier; he had also rescued Walker from any number of scrapes and scandals the younger man had gotten himself into because he preferred womanizing and drinking to concentrating on his legislative work. Then, in 1925, Smith had been instrumental in getting Walker nominated and elected to replace Mayor Hylan, an incompetent who was allied with Smith's enemy, William Randolph Hearst. Walker was not without his faults, of course, but he had pledged to reform and Smith believed that with some guidance he could succeed as mayor of New York City. In any case, Smith's personal prestige was tied to the kind of job that Walker would do as mayor of the nation's largest city and, to a certain degree, to the new mayor's personal behavior as well.

Unfortunately, Walker had also been a severe disappointment as mayor, a job the flamboyant and fun-loving playboy – often referred to as “the Night Mayor” for the schedule and company he preferred – considered something of an inconvenience. His flashy lifestyle and marital infidelities titillated an entire city, but in Smith’s eyes, he was both personally and politically irresponsible. But Walker had also carved out his own base of power within Tammany Hall – principally by weeding out Smith’s loyalists and by catering to the district leaders, hungry for the graft and corruption on which they feasted. It was all right for Smith to demand obedience from the machine, Walker seemed to think, but it was he who had to listen to their complaints – and Walker did not have the stomach for that.

No sooner had the presidential election ended when there were reports that Smith blamed Walker for not supporting him enthusiastically enough in 1928, as well as reports that he and Walker might come to blows over the mayoral contest in 1929. The persisting reports that Smith himself might try to oust Walker and run for mayor himself, or else oust Olvany and take *his* seat, were symptoms of the malaise within Tammany Hall. In fact, Smith did not have the muscle to do either: Walker had gained the upper hand, aided by the simmering hostility to Smith and the former governor’s lack of any real power.

When Olvany resigned (due to “ill health”) on March 16, 1929, the latent hostility between Smith and Walker surfaced. The emboldened mayor even embarrassed Smith at

a dinner with reporters by pointedly joking about Olvany's supposed ill health. It was clear that if those who led Tammany had to choose between Walker and Smith, their loyalty would be to the former. Some of them did not even want to consult Smith in the selection of Olvany's replacement. The former governor did have some candidates he preferred (primarily his old friend Tom Foley), but it seemed clear that if he prevailed this time, as he had in 1924, the price for Tammany would be the shelving of Jimmy Walker as mayor, and many in the Wigwam regarded this as too high a price to pay. Smith sized up the situation easily enough and indicated that he would stay out of the selection process unless he was invited to intervene in the event there was a deadlock. Perhaps to smooth over the significant transition at Tammany's helm that was taking place, or perhaps hesitating before taking the momentous step of repudiating Smith, the machine's executive committee a few days later did decide to consult with Smith, Walker, Senator Wagner, and James A. Foley, about who it should choose to succeed Olvany. Although this was seen as a victory for Smith by some observers, it was primarily for show.

Walker's triumph was assured when in early April the state Supreme Court ruled that the five-cent fare for the city's transit lines should be retained. This highly popular decision, an important victory for Walker, gave him and his allies within Tammany itself just enough leverage to get his candidate, Manhattan district leader John F. Curry, narrowly elected as its next head. Curry was a district leader par excellence and anything but a friend of Al Smith. The announcement of Curry's selection, the New York Times said, would mark a "new deal" for the New York City machine and the resurgence of a local

emphasis. In elevating Curry, Tammany was brazenly dropping the pretense that it had been reformed and “modernized” by Smith, and indeed the whole “cult of respectability” Tammany had been forced to don: henceforth, it would be going back to the old ways. Curry eagerly cooperated with Walker in stripping from Tammany Hall virtually all “the good-government elements” Smith had brought in. Thus Smith’s influence within Tammany Hall had now apparently dropped to the vanishing point. In his anger, Smith threatened Walker with defeat if he ran in 1929, but Walker just scoffed at this warning.

The nadir came on July 4, at Tammany’s traditional patriotic celebration at its new home on 17th Street. Smith did speak (on the importance of personal liberty, which in his mind included opposition to prohibition), and he was well-received.<sup>39</sup> The real star of the July 4 event, though, was none other than Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt, whom the members of Tammany enthusiastically cheered as the next president of the United States. Being elbowed aside again like this here, at his political home, could only have opened Smith’s wounds. But the pain went even deeper, for now Walker, too, had shown himself to be ungrateful and untrustworthy, and Smith was hurt and frustrated by this treatment as much as by Roosevelt’s. The two younger men whom Smith had helped and mentored – indeed, he had actually put them in their current positions of power – had almost at once both frozen him out, first in Albany and now in New York City. He had little political influence left – at least in his own state. Walker’s re-election victory in the fall only confirmed this fact.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Smith’s guest on this occasion was Winston Churchill.

<sup>40</sup> Smith did campaign for Walker, dutifully and unenthusiastically, in 1929. He retaliated against the Mayor by not mentioning him by name when the two men gave their kickoff addresses together at Tammany Hall: he simply encouraged voters to vote the “straight Democratic ticket.” In his second

After these further disappointments, Smith must have turned with some relief to the two big non-political tasks before him during the first part of 1929: writing his autobiography and planning for the new Empire State Building. These tasks might have their own challenges, but surely they would be benign ones in comparison to what he had been through. It is not known how Smith decided to write the story of his life, but it is likely that Belle Moskowitz convinced him that he could make some money by doing so now, while he could still capitalize on his political career and presidential campaign. She helped him with the writing, presumably by editing the long discourses Smith dictated in segments ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 words each and by shaping them into a coherent whole. Although the book's provocative title, Up to Now, implied that Smith's career was not yet finished, there is no evidence to indicate that either Smith or his helper were in fact hinting that he hoped to return to politics; it is true, however, that it (along with the Empire State Building and occasional magazine articles carrying Smith's by-line) would serve to keep his name in front of the public.<sup>41</sup> Having begun his work in April, he was two-thirds of the way through the writing by mid-June and finished by sometime during

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speech Smith did mention Walker once – as one of the three city-wide candidates who ought to be elected. It does not appear that Smith referred to Walker by name in his final speech. In all three addresses, Smith concentrated on the Republican opposition.

<sup>41</sup> These articles, nine of which continued to appear until 1933 (there would be just one more, in 1939), bore such titles as “Safeguarding Our Assets – The Children” and “Electioneering, Old and New”; many were on the art of political campaigning and appeared in the Saturday Evening Post. Rarely did these articles say anything bearing on political issues or controversies. One or two of them were on more technical topics, labor law and low-cost housing. It surely is no coincidence that the articles ceased soon after the death of Belle Moskowitz – and after the final dashing of Smith's hopes that he might become president.

the summer. This would enable his publisher, Viking Press, to put the book into the hands of the reviewers and the public by the fall's new publishing season.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Raskob and his partners were making final plans for the financing and construction of the Empire State Building. A byproduct of the rivalry between two giants of the automobile world, Raskob and Walter Chrysler, whose building was already in progress, the Empire State Building when erected would forever serve as a symbol of the exuberant 1920s in America's most exuberant city. By late August 1929, Raskob was ready to spring his plans on the world. His new building would replace the venerable Waldorf-Astoria Hotel at Fifth Avenue and 34th Street, shifting the focal point of Manhattan up the island a considerable distance.

The Empire State Building ultimately would rise 103 stories in all, making it then the world's tallest structure. Al Smith would earn \$50,000 a year as the President of the Empire State Building Corporation; his "main business," it was announced, would be overseeing the erection and promotion of the building bearing the firm's name.<sup>43</sup> In fact, he did involve himself in these construction and management details, but as time passed his job evolved into being the "public face" for the new behemoth as well as its ceremonial host. It seemed a fitting assignment for Smith, who was himself something of

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<sup>42</sup> Presumably Smith had spent some time earlier in editing and partially rewriting his campaign addresses for publication; this was the volume that was sent to contributors to the Democratic Party.

<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Smith also continued to add corporate directorships. He went on the board of Knott Hotels, Consolidated Indemnity and Insurance Company, and the National Surety Company. These positions came to him through friends, whose interlocking directorships enabled Smith to expand his own. The marketing of the Empire State Building, which began in April 1930, was handed to Belle Moskowitz's firm; her son, Josef Israels II, continued this assignment after his mother's death. It was Belle Moskowitz's idea to hire the photographer Lewis Hine, whose photographs of the building's construction became instant classics.

a symbol of New York City. In an interview, Smith spoke of looking forward to a position that involved no partisanship, no public opinion to win over, and no need to persuade people to cooperate.

Two months later, the Black Thursday crash on Wall Street brought economic distress to the nation, but preparations for the Empire State Building went on.<sup>44</sup> Demolition of the old hotel commenced on September 22, 1929. The two-acre site began to be excavated in late January 1930, and construction officially began on the following St. Patrick's Day, March 17, 1930. Within weeks the political skills Smith thought he was putting away were dusted off and put to use, as he was called upon to mediate a labor dispute between the iron and steel workers and the construction company, which had subcontracted with a firm that employed the open shop.<sup>45</sup> Mostly, though, Smith was occupied with watching the astoundingly rapid pace of construction on the budding Empire State Building push four or five floors a week into the sky and with talking about its wonders.

Through a combination of innovative engineering techniques and what a later generation would call “just-in-time” delivery, the builders of the new skyscraper set new records for construction. Some 60,000 tons of steel made in Pittsburgh was delivered eighteen hours

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<sup>44</sup> Raskob's search for funding began in early October 1929, just days before the crash – and after work had already begun. Although he and his partner, Pierre S. du Pont, put considerable capital themselves into the building, major funding also came through a loan from Metropolitan Life Insurance Company – on whose board Smith had until recently served. Meanwhile, Smith's friend James J. Riordan had, on November 9, 1929, taken his own life, and Smith had to step in as chairman of the board of County Trust Company in his stead. Dealing with the aftermath of Riordan's suicide involved Smith – inevitably, with Raskob as his partner and spokesman – in some fancy financial maneuverings aimed at rescuing the bank from worried customers and investors, and in some equally fancy explanations to a U.S. Senate committee looking into failures in the financial industry. The collapse of the bank, and with it Smith's dreams of being an unqualified success in business, must have offset some of the pleasure he was getting from the Empire State Building project.

<sup>45</sup> His efforts to settle the dispute were for naught, however. Interestingly, Smith several times honored craftsmen and laborers on the building, often mentioning that he, too, was a union member.

later more than 300 miles away and almost at once put into place, reputedly often while the steel was still warm from its own creation. Major components (beams and windows, for example) were built in factories and then assembled at the site. Stone for the facing was rough hewn at the quarries and had its uneven edges covered with metal strips after it was put in place. Smith was able to lay the Empire State Building's cornerstone on September 17, 1930, and the construction was completed on March 1, 1931. The building had taken, in all, just 410 days to complete. It would remain the tallest building in the world for more than four decades.

With its clean, vertical lines, eye-catching setbacks, sleekly modern appearance, and much-shorter neighbors, the Empire State Building could not help but capture attention; at once it would become a beloved icon that eighty years later still says "New York City" to people around the world, whether they have seen it in person or not. From the 88th floor 200 feet to its very peak (at 1,454 feet, officially 103 stories) stood a great steel, aluminum, and glass tower, intended as a mast for dirigibles. (Later, radio and television antennas replaced the mast.) In all, the building cost nearly \$25 million dollars (half of what it would have cost before the Crash brought hard times – and reduced wages – to the construction industry); site acquisition raised the total to about \$41 million. Here stood some 3.7 million cubic feet, ready for renting when it opened to the public on May 1, 1931. But there were few tenants on that day (only 23% of the rental space) and fifty-six floors stood entirely unfinished and empty. Much of the early revenue came from the thousands who eagerly paid to ride the elevators to the observation deck. The next

decade and more of Smith's life would be spent laboring to fill this landmark that Raskob had so boldly envisioned and brought into being.<sup>46</sup>

There was a side of Smith that took deep pleasure from the practical concerns of seeing that the Empire State Building rose steadily to dominate the New York skyline. He had always enjoyed working through problems, reducing them to their essence and then seeking solutions that would last. In this latest chapter of his life he was dealing with architects, contractors, building inspectors, labor leaders, and a myriad others. But although he was fully involved in the details of the building, he was, as one perceptive visitor said, "chiefly valuable to his associates for the weight which his name carries with the general public and with individuals in business and in public life." This visitor concluded that Smith at bottom felt out of place in this "unfamiliar and unnatural world" of business. "It isn't his affair." His affair was with politics, and as the Empire State Building came into being in early 1930 Smith evidently felt ready to turn at least some of his attention back to his first love.

### **The Battle for the Democratic Party**

While Smith had been busying himself during 1929 and early 1930 with Tammany Hall, his autobiography, and the new skyscraper on Fifth Avenue, Governor Roosevelt had been busying himself with making New York State and its Democratic Party his own. It was increasingly obvious that – whatever his intentions – he would be considered a

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<sup>46</sup> Smith would also be working to recoup his own monetary investment, thought to have been substantial, in the success of the new building. In December 1935, Smith stated that the building was 35% rented.

strong contender for his party's presidential nomination in 1932, assuming that Roosevelt would complete a successful first term in Albany, gain reelection, and avoid any major gaffes. With Smith seemingly out of the picture, Roosevelt might well inherit much of his predecessor's core support, in New York and elsewhere. How successfully he could attract the many Southern and Western Democrats who had been cool to Smith (or who nominated him in 1928 only in desperation in order to dispose of him) was an open question. Most commentators assumed that Smith would be eager to see Roosevelt succeed him as the party's nominee, too, but as it transpired that would also turn out to be an open question.

There is little evidence through 1930, as during the previous year, that Roosevelt asked Smith to consult with him on state matters, although the two men did meet socially and friends of the two men later said that Roosevelt had often invited Smith to come see him without success. (In later years, Smith would say, bitterly, "Frank Roosevelt just threw me out of the window.") Roosevelt was clearly seeking to show that he was his own man in Albany, and his administration developed a new focus on issues that would attract support upstate as well as in New York City. He was enjoying a protracted honeymoon with the newly conciliatory Republicans in the legislature, and he was spending far more time visiting the counties above New York City than Smith ever had. As time went on, too, many of the aides who had worked for Smith and stayed on in the new administration (Ed Flynn, Jim Farley, Frances Perkins, and others) warmed to their new leader.<sup>47</sup> Although they might have continuing affection for Smith, it was Roosevelt now

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<sup>47</sup> Both Farley and Flynn had worked in the Roosevelt headquarters during the 1928 presidential campaign, so their allegiance to the new governor was a natural development.

who had their political fealty. A change came in the state Democratic Party, too, where the ineffective William Bray, a Smith ally, was eased out and replaced by Farley. In addition, the party's offices were moved to Albany so that there could be closer cooperation between the state committee and Democratic elected officials – in particular, Roosevelt.

Smith did congratulate Roosevelt for the latter's legislative victory in January 1930 on the issue of water power, a matter he himself had wrestled with during the 1920s, and perhaps in response Roosevelt sent to Smith an inscribed copy of the state's 1930-31 budget. He then praised Smith for laying the foundation for the legislation on water power when he signed it in March.<sup>48</sup> Smith returned the favor in June by publicly praising Roosevelt's performance as governor, and he predicted that his successor would be elected to a second term. It came as no surprise, then, when it was learned in July that Smith would campaign for that second term for Roosevelt – in addition to giving at least one address out of the state. Indeed, the renomination and re-election of Roosevelt would be, Smith's friends indicated, the start of the ex-governor's "comeback" in politics.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> In truth, there were differences between the two men on water power. Smith had preferred a public service commission, which would determine power rates, while Roosevelt favored a more progressive approach.

<sup>49</sup> Smith also may have been interested in 1930 in being appointed to the Water Power Commission in New York, but he did not persist and this never came about. Roosevelt wrote to Smith in June of that year noting the "tongue-wagging of some people," undoubtedly a reference to rumors of a division between them, and asked Smith whether Roosevelt should announce that he had invited Smith to serve on the Commission but that he had declined owing the pressures of business, or whether Smith would prefer to write a letter to that effect. There is no evidence that Smith wrote to Roosevelt on this matter. It was about this time, in early June 1930, that we know Roosevelt first began to suspect that Smith could be positioning himself for another run at the presidency.

There was a slight hitch, though: the leaders of Tammany Hall seemed to be giving Smith a cold shoulder. They had not invited him to the July 4, 1930, event, and they did not name him (inadvertently, they said) as a delegate to the state party convention in October. Nevertheless, Smith would attend even if he lacked the credentials (100 delegates reportedly offered him their proxies); indeed, he would be putting Roosevelt's name into nomination.<sup>50</sup> In a way, Smith would be repaying Roosevelt for speeches the latter had given for him at national conventions in 1920, 1924, and 1928, along with the Governor's stands on water power and prohibition. Smith might be doing his duty as a good party man, therefore, but he must also have realized that if he did not do this for Roosevelt he would lose any hope of influencing him in the future. Whatever his private thoughts about Roosevelt's abilities and actions, Smith had no just cause for abandoning the man he had selected as his successor. Roosevelt, thought to be in favor of a wet plank in the 1932 national platform, now wrote to Senator Wagner that he supported repeal of prohibition and control of alcohol by the states, and Smith voiced his approval of Roosevelt's views. According to Claude Bowers, this statement by Roosevelt was Smith's price for nominating him.<sup>51</sup>

Smith's speech to the state convention on behalf of Roosevelt was full of warm praise for him. Smith described Roosevelt's "clear brain," his "big heart," and his affection for "the poor, the sick and the afflicted." No man had worked harder or done more as governor, Smith declared. All this was surely sweet music to the ears of Roosevelt and his

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<sup>50</sup> Howe recommended to Roosevelt that he quietly try to have Smith named to a vacancy in Dutchess County.

<sup>51</sup> Jouett Shouse later claimed that Roosevelt had agreed to (or would not oppose) a wet plank in the state party's platform during the spring of 1930 but by mid-summer was hedging on whether he would follow through on his commitment, relenting only after "some pretty dire threats."

supporters, in New York and elsewhere. But when Smith also remarked that the Democrats should oust any state or local officials who were unfaithful to the public trust and should make prohibition a major issue as they looked ahead politically, the music took on discordant overtones for Roosevelt's backers: Smith had touched upon the two matters that could upset the Governor's political bandwagon.

True to his word, Smith did speak for Roosevelt during the state campaign.<sup>52</sup> On eight occasions, in New York City and upstate as well, he described the latter as carrying on his own legislative program. Smith spent much of his time in these addresses reviewing the Republican hostility to his program back as far as 1918 and reciting his own bouts with their recalcitrance (in three speeches, Smith did not even mention Roosevelt by name), but he left no doubt that he supported Roosevelt's re-election. Looking beyond the state, Smith also discussed the economic situation, farm relief, and, again, prohibition. No doubt, Smith's support contributed to Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in November 1930 – a victory that overshadowed even Smith's healthy re-election margins – but the Governor would have been re-elected without him.<sup>53</sup> (One sign of the changed order of things in New York State came when Smith's first speech for Roosevelt in 1930, a radio address in New York City, was pre-empted so that the network carrying it could pick up a campaign speech that Roosevelt himself was about to deliver elsewhere.)

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<sup>52</sup> He also contributed financially to Roosevelt's campaign.

<sup>53</sup> The election results in 1930 (primaries and general elections) also included defeats for Senator Funiford M. Simmons, who had bolted the Democratic Party in North Carolina, and several other prominent Southern Democrats who had opposed Smith. Their defeats could often be attributed to state issues, though their actions in 1928 were also factors. In general, Raskob and Shouse seem to have let the Southern Democrats deal with how the 1928 bolters would be treated, although they did send party funds to at least one state, Virginia.

Smith also agreed to give addresses (also broadcast by radio) in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, his lone conquests in 1928 outside the Solid South, to campaign in 1930. The reception he received in both places (Providence and Boston, respectively) was warm, enthusiastic, and noisy – even more so than in 1928.<sup>54</sup> Thousands turned out to see and hear him. In the former city, but speaking as well to a national radio audience, Smith attacked Hoover on prosperity. The President had failed to deliver on his pledge that his election would ensure prosperity, Smith said – just as he had warned voters in 1928. Hoover had also refused to face the problem of unemployment until he was compelled to and was not using government agencies to combat that unemployment. Although the President was not responsible for the current depression, Smith went on, he had deceived the electorate in 1928 with false figures and false promises. What Hoover had predicted would come with a Democratic victory then had in fact come with his own. Smith's remarks in Boston were similar, but he mentioned other topics as well – the tariff, for example. He got the biggest response here when he mentioned repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act. He called attention to the fact that his home state had of New York now taken a stand that went even further than the one the national party had taken in 1928.

When Roosevelt was re-elected by a huge margin in New York, this understandably brought him to the front of the pack for the 1932 Democratic nomination – even if he continued to insist that he was paying no attention to his personal political future. Others were doing so, of course, and some of them still regarded Roosevelt as the favored

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<sup>54</sup> Smith had refused to add formal addresses in Connecticut to those in Rhode Island and Massachusetts because “we might, with propriety, be accused of playing to the East to the neglect of the rest of the country. This may not be good politics.” He did speak briefly in New Haven, Connecticut, however.

candidate of his predecessor, Al Smith. With Roosevelt in office for another two years, and with a significant mandate besides, the new year 1931 would begin to bring the next presidential campaign into sharper focus. For the Governor, there were at least two potential threats, possibly a third. The first was prohibition. Smith had already made it clear that he believed the Democratic Party had to take an unambiguous stand against it in 1932, and already numerous dry leaders and Southern Democrats had warned against a wet candidate, like Smith; Roosevelt seemed to be regarded as a good alternative, but if he were to be identified as a wet like Smith there would be questions about his viability as a candidate.

The second issue was the situation at Tammany Hall, where the organization's new boss, Curry, was now under investigation. With Roosevelt widely viewed as a friend of Tammany Hall, his actions when the investigation, almost inevitably, brought forth evidence of corruption and graft, would be scrutinized closely. Indeed, how Roosevelt would handle these two matters – his stand on prohibition and his treatment of the New York City machine – might well affect his ability to attract support both in the country and in his own state.

The third potential threat to Roosevelt was the role that Al Smith might aspire to play in 1932, either as a candidate himself or, more likely, as a major player in determining what the party would stand for and who it would nominate. Would Smith ultimately become a candidate after all, despite his statement right after his defeat that he would never run for office again? Some of his friends thought that he was at least “receptive” to being

renominated. They also professed to believe that the tide to get rid of prohibition was so strong it might sweep Smith in – he would, after all, be the logical nominee in 1932 if that happened, and conventions had been known to stampede for the champion of a burning issue. The 1930 electoral outcome – not only in New York but in the other states where Smith had also campaigned – seemed to have raised Smith’s prestige. Perhaps his star had not yet set: he might exert some influence on the platform. Or, he might have “veto power” over the nominee, perhaps even become the nominee of his party in 1932.

But most commentators still believed, through 1931, it was “virtually out of the question” that Smith would be a presidential candidate himself in 1932 – or that he could get the nomination again even if he did want it. A few of them still harbored doubts about his sincerity, suspecting that talk of Smith’s running was all a sham – a New York ploy to scare delegates into Roosevelt’s eager hands and to disassociate Roosevelt from Tammany Hall. Still other commentators were simply, and hopelessly, perplexed by what Al Smith planned to do in 1932. Even the reliably insightful columnist for New Republic, T.R.B., confessed his inability to make up his mind about what Smith might do.

Although Smith himself reiterated in early March 1931 that he was not seeking the nomination (he merely would like to be a “plain worker in the ranks,” he stated), the next day he also said – as he had at other times during the past year and more – that he was not entirely out of politics. The presence of Raskob at the helm of the Democratic National Committee presumably would give Smith a distinct advantage over any other candidate

for the nomination. How closely Smith and Raskob would work together on the business of the National Committee's functions during the fallow years between presidential elections is not known, although surviving documentation suggests that Raskob used him on occasions – to attend meetings, to cultivate people, to raise money, and so forth. (Not all of these uses were publicized.) Clearly, though, Raskob and his new assistant, Jouett Shouse, who was named the chair of the Executive Committee at the end of April 1929 and immediately established offices in Washington, D.C., managed the day-to-day activities for Raskob, not Smith.<sup>55</sup>

Smith certainly made sure that he was not forgotten by the American public. He wrote (actually, dictated) a number of articles for various periodicals, and then after January 1931 a weekly column for the McNaught newspaper syndicate.<sup>56</sup> He began work on a second book, to be called The Citizen and His Government when it was published in 1935. And every month or two he gave a speech, sometimes on the radio. The topics of these speeches ranged from the need for model tenements to the cost of government to

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<sup>55</sup> Shouse, a Kentuckian, had been an Assistant Secretary of the Treasury under Carter Glass during 1919-20 and then a Washington attorney. In 1924 he had supported McAdoo's candidacy. In 1928, he had been recommended to Raskob by James J. Hoey, Smith's good friend, and since the presidential campaign had ended he had been assisting Raskob in New York City by helping to raise money to pay off the party's debts. Raskob stated that Shouse had agreed to accept the position if Raskob would remain as chairman. Shouse's salary between 1929 and 1932, he said in 1961, did not come from the National Committee, which leads to the conclusion that Raskob paid him out of his own pocket. Belle Moskowitz also assisted Raskob in 1929 and afterwards by providing soliciting information from contacts around the county and then by preparing publicity for the Democratic National Committee's activities. Shouse later hired the very able and industrious newspaperman Charles Michelson away from the New York World to become the Democratic Party's chief publicist, and Michelson kept up a steady barrage of attacks on Hoover.

<sup>56</sup> He was paid, he said, ninety cents a word for his articles, which he dictated in evenings and on Saturday afternoons; Belle Moskowitz then edited the text before it was sent to the syndicate. The topics of Smith's weekly columns, like those of his occasional articles, ranged over a wide terrain: highway construction, disarmament, capital punishment, consolidation of county government, and Muscle Shoals, just to name five of the 89 columns, which appeared between January 4, 1931, and September 11, 1932. Prohibition, or some aspect of it, was the theme of seven columns. Economic conditions and how the government should respond to them predominated.

the urgency of addressing the problems of unemployment; on Armistice Day in 1931, he even ventured into foreign affairs by discussing disarmament and America's isolation from Europe. Invited by the North Carolina legislature early in 1931 to address that body, Smith accepted – only to find himself similarly invited by those of South Carolina and Georgia.<sup>57</sup>

Except for his remarks mocking Republican “prosperity” and his criticism of President Hoover's policies, little of this was controversial or even overtly political – although Smith did use several of his McNaught columns to advocate his views on prohibition and Raskob's proposals regarding the Democratic National Committee.<sup>58</sup> Some of his public statements grew out of his positions either on the Welfare Council Coordinating Committee, the President's Emergency Committee, and the Emergency Unemployment Relief Committee or else his service to the American Red Cross and relief organizations in New York City. But through these means – aided by the assiduous Belle Moskowitz, a master of public relations – Smith evidently was intent upon keeping his name and credibility in front of the public, just in case he would ever be needed. A careful reader could see that he was making a series of constructive suggestions about national policy – much as he might have had his idea for making the defeated presidential nominee a United States “Senator-at-Large” been implemented.<sup>59</sup> Smith even lobbied his friends in Washington on a few issues before Congress.

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<sup>57</sup> He declined these other two invitations.

<sup>58</sup> On one occasion Smith did joke about the next time he ran for office.

<sup>59</sup> Smith also continued to add corporate responsibilities, for example becoming chairman of Meehan Coal Company. Reading Smith's articles and speeches now is to be impressed by the contrast – or conflict – between his enlightened suggestions (a universal health system and assuaging the psychological aspects of the depression) and his old-fashioned solutions (reorganizing government and holding costs down). In that

There was no reason to doubt, though, that Al Smith shared the views of his good – and astute – friend James J. Hoey, who was telling everyone who asked that “it is the consensus of opinion among Governor Smith’s friends throughout the country that if he were nominated in 1932 we would have the 1928 battle of bigotry and intolerance all over again and that he would be defeated.” Most of those close to him validated Hoey’s report by repeating, either then or in later years, the same conclusion: Smith was not going to be a presidential candidate in 1932. The agony of realizing this was so, and then coming to realize, too, that any Democrat nominated in 1932 would win the presidency must have gnawed at Smith during 1929 to 1932.

Roosevelt’s followers did not seem to be very alarmed by the possibility that Smith might become a rival for the presidential nomination in 1932. As one of them said, “Every day [Smith] remains silent lessens his influence, and it is only his supposed power that gives us any concern.” They were among those who continued to hope that “[Smith] would rather be known as the savior of the Democratic Party than be President of the United States.” Nevertheless, some of those around Roosevelt urged him to solicit his predecessor’s endorsement, but the Governor refused: Al would “do the right thing at the right time,” he said. Roosevelt was guided by more than personal generosity in making this decision: he knew that keeping some distance between himself and Smith could only help him in attracting Democrats who wanted no repeat of the bruising 1928 campaign.

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sense he was not unlike most other leaders of the time, Hoover included, who could not grasp the totality of the economic and social disaster they were living through. It would be Smith’s successor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, who would break out of this mold, not without some difficulty of his own, but that is another story.

Those in the Roosevelt circle also believed that the New York governor was far in front, anyway, having gained the support not only of many former Smith backers and Roman Catholics but of others, mainly in the South and West, who had never supported Smith. Those in the first group still liked and admired Smith but concluded that he would lose again, perhaps because of his religion; it was not expedient to nominate him, therefore, when the Democrats had a real chance to win in 1932. Members of the second group would take almost anyone in preference to Smith, even a man who seemed to be his protégé and who had views so near to those of Smith himself. A March 1931 poll of the delegates to the Houston convention in 1928, half of whom sent back their replies, revealed that in almost every state they strongly favored Roosevelt as the party's nominee in 1932.<sup>60</sup>

But there was another possible scenario for 1932, and it was one that Smith's most dedicated followers could take some hope in. It was that Roosevelt's new popularity would level off or even wane during the next year, that numerous favorite sons would tie up key states, and that the convention would have to settle the matter. With the economy continuing to unravel and Hoover seemingly unable to rescue the situation, anything could happen before the 1932 convention. The country's distaste for prohibition, which the Republicans stubbornly defended, might change many minds, and when the time was right the Democrats might find some candidate irresistible. For now, waiting and

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<sup>60</sup> For Smith, the willingness to accept Roosevelt, whose views on most matters – particularly prohibition, in this instance – must have reinforced his conviction that the South and West had rejected him on the basis of his religion. Only in three states did Smith appear to have strong support among the ex-delegates: Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Delaware. It was also revealing that those former delegates who favored Roosevelt had Smith as their second choice, and vice versa.

watching was the right course. Smith may have felt this way himself. In his heart of hearts, he must have sensed that there was still a chance that he would be renominated, if the situation developed in a positive way – there might even be a stampede to give him another shot at the presidency. Until he was certain about what might be happening, it was best for him to keep his own counsel. For Roosevelt, then, Al Smith remained only a potential rival.

The two other potential threats to Roosevelt's unimpeded run for the 1932 nomination, though, crucifixion on the cross of prohibition and embarrassment by wrongdoing at Tammany Hall, both did materialize in early 1931. First, it appeared that Roosevelt would find himself forced to take an unambiguous public stand on what the Democrats should say and do about prohibition, thereby exposing the fault line in his own nascent support. Second, exposure of the festering problems at Tammany Hall in New York might compel Roosevelt to act either for or against its new leadership, thereby exposing a similar fault line within his support at home. And there was a new threat, too: a growing suspicion among more conservative Democrats, based on what they had seen in his gubernatorial record so far (for example, not just more government control of water power but financial aid to dairy farmers in need and vigorous efforts to deal with unemployment and its consequences), that Roosevelt was liable to champion a liberal – or perhaps even radical – economic program in his campaign for the nomination and for the White House. This suspicion might pose an even more potent threat to Roosevelt's presidential hopes because among those who held it were the men who controlled the Democratic Party's machinery – including Al Smith.

Two years had passed since Raskob had tried to get the Democratic National Committee to take a position on prohibition, specifically his own proposal: a new amendment authorizing state control of alcohol, contingent on the voters' approval through a referendum – a plan that he regarded as superior to outright appeal, although it would achieve the same results for the states that chose to take that control.<sup>61</sup> Since then, Raskob's opponents had, some of them no doubt uneasily, acquiesced in his leadership. They also did not object loudly to his personal bankrolling of the party's small central operation to the tune of \$10,000 a month – possibly, a cynic might suggest, because they wanted him to pay off as much as possible of the huge debt he had run up in 1928 (down from \$1,399,500 in April 1929 to \$662,000 in March 1931, with \$255,000 of that owed to Raskob himself) before they would have their showdown with him.<sup>62</sup>

There was considerable admiration throughout the party and elsewhere for the job that Raskob had done for the Democrats during 1929 and again in 1930 – a year when the party had recaptured control of the House of Representatives, achieved parity with the G.O.P in the Senate, and seemed poised to capture the presidency in 1932. But there continued to be, too, considerable grouching among Democrats and others about having someone like Raskob – a former Republican! – in charge of what he called “our party,” which one editor said could be called his only because of his “bare-faced effort to steal

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<sup>61</sup> According to Smith, who also adopted this plan and publicized it in an article in Liberty in January 1932, it had originated with Pierre S. du Pont.

<sup>62</sup> Raskob apparently had also heavily contributed, out of his own pocket, to the campaigns of numerous Democratic candidates in 1930, in many states across the country. Some Democrats, Robinson among them, advocated letting the state parties raise funds to pay off the debt – probably recognizing that whomever the party owed would want to have the most say within its councils.

the Democratic party organization.” Just days after the 1930 elections, Raskob proposed sending an open letter (commonly referred to as the “round robin”) – signed by past nominees James M. Cox, John W. Davis, and Smith, and by the party’s Senate and House leaders, Robinson and John Nance Garner – to the incoming president pledging cooperation on the issue of business recovery and against “dangerous” legislation.<sup>63</sup>

The outcry over this proposal eventually scuttled it, but attention soon turned to Raskob’s – and the National Committee’s – proper role in the process of selecting a presidential candidate the next year.<sup>64</sup> Raskob announced another meeting, for March 5, when he would presumably seek to get the Committee to endorse the views that he had presented in 1929 regarding its role within the party. Raskob addressed issues other than prohibition in these proposals, which he termed a reaffirmation of Jeffersonian principles, for example revising the tariff, getting government out of business, and loosening restrictions on business combinations.<sup>65</sup> Although the core of the opposition to Raskob’s proposals within the party was to his recommendations on prohibition, there was also unhappiness with these other proposals, which were viewed not only as decidedly pro-business but as a move – like the round robin – to make the Democrats in 1932 stand for most of what the Republicans espoused. Some Democrats went so far as to suspect, with Cordell Hull, that if he were successful Raskob would be happy seeing “a virtual merger

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<sup>63</sup> Interestingly, Roosevelt’s lieutenant-governor, Herbert H. Lehman, also had endorsed the proposed letter to Hoover. If Raskob thought that he could woo Lehman away from Roosevelt, though, he was mistaken.

<sup>64</sup> Raskob did not give up on the notion of a bipartisan effort to address the economic crisis. As late as May 1932 he was still developing a proposal that would create an emergency committee, chaired by President Hoover, that would include five Democrats (Smith, Young, Baruch, Garner, and Robinson) and five Republicans (former President Calvin Coolidge included). The committee would have had authority to make provisional decisions in the absence of Congress and to override decisions made by the Department of Justice and the Interstate Commerce Committee when the public interest required it. Hoover wanted no part of this idea.

<sup>65</sup> He also supported the five-day work week and unemployment insurance.

of the two old parties except as to prohibition.” They had suspected his motives ever since the round robin right after the 1930 election, and they were prepared to fight.<sup>66</sup>

So it was that Southern dries and others served notice again, this time in a notable Senate debate, that they would fight any attempt by wets to control the 1932 convention; they might have to swallow a less-than-dry nominee, but they would not accept a wet plank in the platform. Thus it was important that they prevent Raskob from committing the party to this course now, even if it meant having that nasty showdown with him. But even some wet Democrats (along the increasingly influential Shouse) were reluctant to see the Democratic National Committee get involved in setting policy for the party and argued that, for strategic reasons, it might be better to “handle” prohibition at the 1932 convention instead. Setting policy had always been the convention’s prerogative – even Raskob admitted there was no precedent for what he was attempting to get the National Committee to do, although he interpreted its handbook as allowing it. Those opposing Raskob’s proposal thought it was too early anyhow to predict what the party should stand nearly eighteen months away. In addition, an intraparty fight now would be bad publicity.<sup>67</sup>

Roosevelt and his advisors, who opposed the Chairman’s request for an endorsement of his views as not expedient (that word again!), finally had to take their stand: on March 2,

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<sup>66</sup> It is possible Raskob hoped that prohibition would act as a lightning rod and that his other proposals would slip through without too much attention, though there is no doubting the sincerity of his opposition to prohibition. Issues aside, Raskob continued to believe that a proactive national committee was the business-like way for the party to operate – and that were it not for prohibition his proposals would be accepted without question. Byrd and others countered that the Democratic Party was a democratic organization, not a business.

<sup>67</sup> Raskob seems to have viewed any publicity the Democrats were receiving in 1931 as good advertising for 1932.

1931, Flynn introduced a resolution of opposition at a state party meeting in New York and it passed without dissent – underscoring how thoroughly Roosevelt now controlled his state’s party and its leadership.<sup>68</sup> Roosevelt had already taken the unusual step of writing to Smith (whom he had not been able to reach by telephone, Roosevelt said) to express his strong opposition to having the National Committee “pass resolutions of any kind affecting party policies at this time.” Roosevelt also telephoned Senator Cordell Hull of Tennessee to say that he would join Hull and the others who had been planning to oppose Raskob’s efforts.

Roosevelt was making it clear in private that he considered it “inexpedient and wrong for us to pussyfoot” on the “great economic questions that confront our country and which the Repubs. have failed so miserably to solve” and to “adopt any program so filled with weasel words as to lead to any misconception of where we stand” on such matters. Unlike “that comparatively small wing in our Party who believe that we should be a sort of imitation Repub. organization and ‘tread softly’ without carrying a stick, big or little, for malefactors,” Roosevelt said he simply wanted to rely upon the convention and the platform it adopted to accomplish these things. “The minute [the National Committee] attempts to be a policy-forming body it will become the center of political intrigue and a hotbed of acrimonious dissension,” Roosevelt declared. It should, instead, “devote its

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<sup>68</sup> One reason there was no dissent is that Al Smith was not invited to the meeting. Raskob undoubtedly concurred with Shouse’s August 1931 comment to Roosevelt that he and Raskob – and probably Smith as well, although he was not mentioned – viewed the New York resolution as a “gratuitous insult” because they had not been informed beforehand. Roosevelt agreed that they should have been informed and was, Shouse reported to Raskob, “very apologetic.” Raskob wanted Shouse to tell the New York governor that he carried no grudge but that his action had been “heartbreaking” when the Chairman was only trying to be constructive. It was this sort of apparently devious behavior on Roosevelt’s part that made Raskob and Smith suspicious of him, rightly or wrongly.

attention to organizing the Party nationally, in such a way as will insure the victory of whatever candidate may be selected....”

Almost immediately the tide began to turn against Raskob. Smith, speaking in North Carolina the next day, sounded in sympathy with the New Yorkers’ resolution when stated that the convention was the supreme body of the party, not the National Committee, although he also pointedly warned against any attempt to stifle debate at the committee’s meetings and reiterated that prohibition would have to be *a* major issue in 1932. Harry F. Byrd of Virginia in particular counseled Raskob that forcing the resolutions through would threaten the harmony that the party needed at this time. Raskob began to backpedal, now saying he would ask only that the National Committee present its (non-binding) views to the Resolutions Committee in 1932. Although he privately asserted that the National Committee would have approved his recommendations 70 to 30, it had become clear to him that a majority of the National Committee viewed the discussion, let alone the endorsement of his controversial proposals on prohibition, to be a threat to harmony within the party. Urged by Shouse, Raskob also reconsidered his plan to offer his resignation as chairman, a ploy intended to strengthen his position that might now backfire.

When the meeting convened, Smith (who was not a member of the National Committee but had been allowed as titular leader to attend and speak) spoke earnestly for party unity. His apparent unwillingness to countenance Raskob’s attempt to drive a wedge between the Roosevelt proponents and the Southern drys must have confirmed to everyone that

Raskob would not press ahead. The Chairman decided that even asking the National Committee merely to recommend his ideas to the 1932 convention (probably his fall-back position) would not succeed: he told the National Committee that he had dropped his plans to get it to take action on his proposals and would only send around his views for possible action at the committee's next meeting. Raskob's opponents – with Roosevelt's key assistance – had prevailed.

Roosevelt, who had agreed with the Democratic National Committee's conclusion that the matter was a threat to intraparty harmony but had perceived an even more immediate threat to his own political interests, had triumphed in a way that could only redound to his benefit. He was seen by many fellow Democrats as a champion of harmony; he had helped to de-emphasize prohibition as a potential issue within the party; and he had convinced many doubting Democrats that he was a legitimate alternative to Al Smith when it came to the 1932 presidential nomination. (This was not a unanimous opinion: William G. McAdoo, for one, actually regarded Smith as slightly better than Roosevelt, about whose abilities McAdoo had doubts, but he hoped the party could avoid both men; McAdoo's own preference was for Garner.)

Smith appeared to outsiders to have been little more than a bit player in the drama: he got more attention at this meeting for chiding his former running-mate, Senator Robinson, for his opposition to Raskob. Smith told Robinson that he had gone off “half-cocked” and given comfort to the Republicans by criticizing Raskob for wanting repeal when Raskob was for something less than that. It seemed a rather farcical role for the

titular leader of the party, but in fact Smith's "note of amity," as one of the anti-Raskob participants termed it, had helped to avert a damaging fissure in the Democratic Party's leadership body. What Smith had lost, though, was preeminence: Roosevelt was now the golden boy of many of those who were desperately looking for a candidate whose name was not Al Smith.

In actuality, Raskob was not quite done yet. Barely a month later, in early April, he wrote to the members of the National Committee asking them to send him their suggestions for the platform, particularly on prohibition and the various other matters he had talked about in early March (these included the tariff, old-age and unemployment insurance, cooperation between labor and capital, modifications in anti-trust legislation, and state control of utilities). Then, in November, he wrote to 90,000 contributors to the Democratic Party asking them about their views on prohibition and whether it or the economic conditions should be the party's top priority.<sup>69</sup> He also announced that the National Committee would meet again on January 9, 1932, and he repeated his belief that this group had the power to recommend policy to the convention.<sup>70</sup>

Raskob steadfastly denied that his actions reflected support for or opposition to any candidate, but there were widespread suspicions he was endeavoring to undermine

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<sup>69</sup> Raskob's personal views on this question must have alarmed many Democrats. "It would be better for the democratic [sic] party to go down in defeat," he wrote one correspondent, "fighting on clearcut issues which the people could easily understand, than to win through pussy-footing or by default through the temporary weaknesses of our republican [sic] opponents." No one could doubt that Raskob regarded prohibition as one of the clear-cut issues. What he feared was a Democratic platform plank that restricted itself to enforcement, leaving the new Democratic president without sufficient support to secure real changes in prohibition itself.

<sup>70</sup> In a McNaught column, Smith defended Raskob's questionnaire to donors, another instance in which he did take an overtly political stance in his writings.

Roosevelt's support – first by embarrassing Roosevelt, who was trying to attract dries to his banner, and then by encouraging a stalking-horse candidate whose backers would ultimately be delivered to Smith.<sup>71</sup> There were also suspicions that he and Shouse – and perhaps even Smith – would prefer defeat in 1932 to a retreat on the issue of prohibition. Thus it was clear that Roosevelt's stance for a moderately wet plank, along with his still-unannounced candidacy, could be at risk again. But Roosevelt's backers held: it became known that at least two-thirds of the committee was dead set against Raskob. In late December, Smith evidently went to Albany in order to explore whether the leaders of the New York Democratic Party would reverse their earlier stand and withdraw their resolution of opposition to Raskob, but if so he was unsuccessful. A few days before the National Committee's meeting on January 9, 1932, Raskob threw in the towel for good. In the end, this body simply referred the Chairman's plan to the 1932 convention (to be held in Chicago), almost without comment.<sup>72</sup>

This did not mean, of course, that prohibition entirely disappeared as an issue during this early pre-convention period. Smith continued to insist that it had to be an issue in 1932. But Roosevelt's actions in resistance to Raskob had shown many (though not all) skeptics, resigned to having a wet candidate, that he was a "reasonable" wet, unlike Smith. Roosevelt's leadership when the chips were down also extinguished any remaining doubts that he was seeking the nomination on his own behalf and not Smith's.

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<sup>71</sup> Raskob continually denied that he either favored or opposed any particular candidate and once even told his intermediary with Newton D. Baker, Ralph Hayes, that he and Smith had never discussed the nomination in 1932. Those in the Roosevelt camp treated Raskob's avowals with skepticism and then scorn. Shouse, too, protested that he had never endorsed a candidate for 1932, but his working for someone's nomination (let alone *against* someone else's) would not be covered by the word endorsement.

<sup>72</sup> Raskob had also been at work during 1931, with Smith's help, in organizing a "General Committee," the proposed duties of which are unknown. Because Bernard Baruch was considered a possible member, the purpose might have been to raise funds.

As a result, the ranks of Roosevelt's supporters began to swell even more. Persons who decided during 1931 to back Roosevelt were, in their eyes, picking the best available wet – and the wet who was most likely to stop Smith from being nominated again in 1932. The truth of the matter was that Roosevelt was just as wet as Smith and Raskob were, excepting some differences on details.<sup>73</sup> What was different was that Roosevelt recognized the need for the Democrats to emphasize issues that were more central to the country's economic crisis: unlike Raskob or Smith, he was quite willing to let prohibition be the tail on the donkey in 1932. In this attitude, Roosevelt reflected the opinions of many other American Democrats.

The second major threat that Roosevelt had faced as 1931 opened was the situation at Tammany Hall, where a deeply rooted subculture of corruption and graft had led to calls for reform. Bribes, purchases of official positions, extortion, protection of prostitution, inflated city contracts, fees to “facilitate” licenses and other official actions, shakedowns of businesses, and the ever-present bootlegging all were sources of revenue for city officials – and for Tammany. In August 1930, the state's highest court had empowered the irreproachable and determined retired judge (and long-time foe of Tammany) Samuel Seabury to investigate, first, the city's courts, then the conduct of the district attorney. Governor Roosevelt, who seemingly had been reluctant to interfere in the city's affairs, now gave Seabury his blessing. Seabury hired a staff of young lawyers and turned them loose. In 1931 Seabury's mandate was extended to include the entire city government when he was designated the counsel of a legislative committee on the city's government,

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<sup>73</sup> In fact, in early February Raskob reiterated the position he had taken in the summer of 1930.

and he turned his eye squarely on Mayor Walker, who had a large slush fund of what His Honor called “beneficences.”

All along, as the screws were being tightened on corrupt city officials and their Tammany colleagues, it became clear that the survival of Boss Curry, perhaps of Tammany Hall itself, might be at stake. It was also clear that Roosevelt would be in a precarious position himself. As governor, he might be forced to take action on Walker, just as he might be forced to take one on prohibition. What he did about the Night Mayor might affect both his support within New York and his reputation in other parts of the country – where, as 1928 had shown, the city’s organization was still viewed with considerable disfavor. Failure to act decisively would make Roosevelt look like he was catering to Tammany Hall, but removing Walker and otherwise challenging Tammany might backfire by alienating those who provided important political support in his own state.

Smith’s possible presidential candidacy injected an unknown into this situation. Might Tammany see that candidacy as a way of gaining some leverage with Roosevelt, who, unlike Smith, could do them real damage? Smith had a long conversation with Curry in March 1931, and soon there were press reports that Tammany would indeed try to use his presidential “availability” as a club they could hold poised above Roosevelt’s head. What Tammany wanted, specifically, was for the Governor to refuse to accept Seabury’s recommendations and to throw out any charges against Walker. Tammany had been satisfied so far with Roosevelt’s cooperation on patronage – he had actually been more generous than Smith ever had, but now the overall welfare of the organization might be at

stake.<sup>74</sup> The political advantages to Roosevelt outside New York of resistance, even hostility, to him within Tammany Hall were obvious, and it is no wonder that Howe, Farley, and presumably Roosevelt himself began to feel like the road to the nomination was clear once Tammany seemed inclined to back Smith in 1932.

In mid-October, Smith spoke at Tammany Hall, at Curry's request. It was a delicate situation for both him and the organization, which had been cool toward one another for some time now (Smith had not been in the building for months), and there was ample coverage of the event. The former governor received an ovation, and he was hailed as the next president of the United States; it was clear that enthusiasm for Smith among the rank and file of the organization was very high. In return for this welcome, Smith praised the candidates Tammany had put forward and pleaded for the election of an Assembly dominated by Democrats (which would, presumably, ensure that there would be no investigation of the machine). He did not defend Tammany in any way, made no reference to a possible investigation, and said almost nothing about national politics – except to ask for unity within the party. If a courtship was going on, it would seem that Tammany's members (and perhaps some of its leaders) were wooing Al Smith, not the other way around.

But there was more to Smith's remarks at this occasion, and they were something of a bombshell. Roosevelt had ushered through the legislature (and was taking credit for) six amendments to the New York constitution, all of them on somewhat arcane and

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<sup>74</sup> One casualty of the patronage was Smith's friend Bernard L. Shientag, whom he had recommended to Roosevelt as a successor to Joseph M. Proskauer as judge. Roosevelt instead appointed Curry's choice for the position. Smith must have seen this as a blatant affront.

complicated issues that had hardly received any public or press attention, let alone generated any controversy. Smith told his Tammany audience that he supported all but two of the six, and he focused his criticism on the amendment that would authorize an initiative to remove marginal farmland and begin a program of reforestation of the state to ensure future sources of lumber. His main criticism seemed to be that the so-called Hewitt Amendment mandated specified annual appropriations through 1942, whether or not the initiative was successful, though Smith said it had other “wicked” features.

Surprised observers concluded that Smith had decided to take issue with Roosevelt and had chosen the reforestation issue a pretext for trying to discredit Roosevelt. The fact that Smith might initiate some kind of public break with his successor was not the surprise – that had been rumored, even expected, for months. The surprise was the issue: Smith had not spoken out against the Hewitt Amendment during its gestation through four years of study and consideration by two successive legislatures. Nor did anyone else, in either party, seem to oppose the amendment.<sup>75</sup> (Smith’s hosts at Tammany Hall at once made it clear that Smith had not been speaking for them and in fact would give the organization’s votes on this issue to Roosevelt.) Why had Smith chosen this particular measure, which was not controversial in its own state, let alone elsewhere, rather than, say, government control of water power, which would have had national import? His criticism looked very much like the act of a man who was seeking a way to draw a clear line in the sand – either that or political suicide.

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<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, Smith well knew that New Yorkers typically rejected proposed constitutional amendments. And might Smith have chosen this issue, too, because of his lingering unhappiness at how Roosevelt had treated Conservation Commissioner Macdonald?

A week later Smith issued a lengthy statement detailing the reasons for his opposition to four of the six constitutional amendments, principally the one on reforestation. He asserted that his stand was taken purely on the merits of the matter. As a matter of principle, he said, he would oppose using constitutional amendments to accomplish anything that ordinary legislation could do just as well; the state's constitution, he said, ought to be reserved for its organic law. Smith also criticized binding the state to an experiment that would not easily be terminated. He stated his opposition to putting the state in the lumber business, especially when doing so would threaten New York's hallowed timber reserves. And he objected to paying for land purchases through large bond sales rather than through current revenues.

Smith's two attacks on the reforestation amendment quite naturally captured considerable national attention. Some observers were suspicious that New York Democrats, having devised a grand strategy to show that their governor was not a front for or pawn of Smith, had gotten Smith to pick a phony fight with Roosevelt; the reforestation amendment just happened to be the best vehicle for this. Better-informed observers, though they agreed that Smith's surprising opposition to the constitutional amendment was an attempt to precipitate a public quarrel with his successor over something, interpreted his motive as an effort to slow or even derail the Roosevelt presidential juggernaut.<sup>76</sup> They could see that Smith was setting a deliberate course to collide with Roosevelt. They worried that his "frightfully dangerous" disagreement, if it succeeded, had the potential for harming Roosevelt's chances, which otherwise looked quite good, for securing enough strength –

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<sup>76</sup> Meanwhile, Belle Moskowitz and other Smith friends were assuring people that the division of personal opinion between Smith and the Governor was just that and not a disruption of their long friendship.

and delegates – to wrap up the nomination in the near future. What was Smith really up to? Would he try to keep Roosevelt from the nomination? Was he going to become a candidate himself?

Reading between the lines, there may be more to what initially appears to be Smith’s curiously puzzling overreaction to a minor, mundane state constitutional amendment – more than carping about the how Roosevelt’s reforestation proposal would have the state government finance its programs, more than protecting the purity of the state constitution he revered, more than signaling his unhappiness with his successor’s growing political ambitions and stature. Smith had been watching how Roosevelt governed, and he did not like the tendencies he was seeing. He did not approve of Roosevelt’s penchant for listening to the theories of academics and other advisors who had little practical experience, and he was concerned about Roosevelt’s rather cavalier willingness to find and use ways around the restrictions that the sacrosanct state constitution imposed. Smith was worrying that Roosevelt’s amateurish, intuitive, and undisciplined approach to managing the state government might lead to trouble, first in Albany and then in Washington, D.C., if he had the opportunity to hold the executive power there.

Roosevelt acted as surprised as everyone else was by Smith’s action, which he described as a “queer thing,” but some of those close to him seem to have been anticipating that Smith would precipitate some kind of breach with him. Roosevelt was stung by Smith’s action – when he had disagreed with “one or two” things while Smith was the governor, he told one correspondent, he had “kept my mouth shut.” In public, though, Roosevelt

was more diplomatic, since he did not “think the issue was of vital enough importance to cause a party dispute.” When he spoke out a few days later, he mildly suggested that Smith was mistaken about the reforestation amendment and pointed out that having a fixed schedule of mandated payments in the state constitution was hardly a new thing. Roosevelt emphasized that the Hewitt Amendment was the only area in which he and his predecessor disagreed.

Privately, though, Roosevelt believed that reforestation was an issue on which he could best Smith, and the Governor mobilized the new state party machinery he had engineered in order to get out the vote for all six of the amendments. Smith responded to Roosevelt’s defense of the proposed amendment by alleging that it would allow commercial exploitation of the state’s forest reserves. He added that it seemed wrong to him to commit the millions of dollars involved to achieve rural reforestation when the depression had created such urgent needs for expenditures in other areas. The next day, at a rally in New York City, Smith made his first direct criticism of Roosevelt. After a long discussion of the reforestation amendment, Smith rebuked him for attempting to raise taxes at the same time he was asking to commit state funds to the forests.

Roosevelt had the last say. His final speech of the 1931 state campaign was a plea for the reforestation amendment; he did not reply to Smith’s criticism on taxation – and rather pointedly praised Smith’s record as governor. Roosevelt had the last laugh, too: the voters gave the reforestation amendment strong (though less than overwhelming) support, an outcome that was universally interpreted as a victory for the sitting governor over the

man who had preceded him – and on an issue dealing with the kind of governmental minutiae for Smith was renowned. Smith’s friends comforted themselves with the knowledge that he had at least been able to attract attention and influence voters, even with such an unpromising vehicle as reforestation. They also pointed out that Smith had been the amendment’s only critic, and that his criticism had been restricted to just three speeches in New York City. But it was there, though, that Smith actually lost the test of strength because Tammany Hall, presumably eager to extend an I.O.U. to the Governor, encouraged votes for the amendment.<sup>77</sup>

The reforestation incident thus brought to a head the speculation, rampant for several years, that Smith would at some point after 1929 break with Roosevelt, publicly oppose him, and perhaps announce his own candidacy for the presidential nomination in 1932. Smith had never committed himself to Roosevelt – when explicit questions about whether or not he would support his successor for president came up, he generally refused to comment. The two men continued to see each other occasionally, usually on social occasions, and never was there a public hint of coolness or disagreement.

But by 1931 it seemed increasingly obvious to most informed observers, and certainly to the friends of the two men, that there were serious problems in their relationship. Some

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<sup>77</sup> Actually, Smith had the last say on the matter. First, he revisited this issue in May 1933, in one of his editorials for New Outlook, where he reiterated his objections and pointed out that the state, now short of funds, was having to raise taxes to meet constitutionally mandated expenditures for reforestation “whether the money was available or not, whether it was needed or not, and whether the people, on due consideration, wanted it appropriated or not.” The consequence, he said in 1933, was that the constitution had been brought into “disrepute and contempt.” Then, while campaigning for the Democratic ticket in New York in November 1935, Smith pointed out that the legislature had not issued the required bonds for reforestation, making the program a “dead letter” that ought to be removed from the constitution.

of these problems stemmed from their differing views about who should have primacy within the Democratic Party. Smith naturally considered himself the titular leader of the national party until someone else was nominated, no matter how well Roosevelt seemed to be regarded. Roosevelt just as naturally considered himself the de facto leader of that party, Smith having relinquished his leadership first by his defeat and then by his disclaimer of any future political ambitions. There were much deeper issues, however, that this budding rivalry had exposed, and they traced back through the two men's political careers. Neither man set down his views on this topic in full, then or later, though both sometimes hinted at their feelings toward the other. With these clues, and the opinions of persons who knew both Smith and Roosevelt well, there was plenty of contemporary speculation about the underlying causes of the rift that the pressures of political ambition was bringing to the surface. Historians have continued to probe this matter, asking many of the same questions that were asked at the time – questions for which there are no definitive answers.

Did Smith feel that Roosevelt and his circle were unceremoniously shunting him aside within that party, undermining his status and wounding his pride when he should be, instead, regularly consulted on the party's future directions? Did he now believe that, having been a sacrificial lamb in a losing year, 1928, he was entitled to the nomination four years later when the Democrats were sure to prevail?<sup>78</sup> Did he believe that Roosevelt, as the junior partner of the political team, should defer to Smith if he decided to run again and wait for his own turn later on? Did he envy, even resent, Roosevelt's electoral success in New York – a re-election triumph that far outshone his own victories

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<sup>78</sup> He had felt this way in 1922, when he desired to avenge his defeat in 1920.

and showed that Roosevelt was no amateurish flash in the pan?<sup>79</sup> Did he now sense that Roosevelt was moving in his political thinking far beyond the urban progressivism that Smith had somewhat hesitantly adopted years before? Did he now have such deep reservations about Roosevelt's ability, character, and performance as governor (he would not have been alone in having them) that he feared what a Roosevelt presidency would do – and did not want to help put him in the White House, as he had the state house in Albany?<sup>80</sup>

Did Smith believe the rumors that Roosevelt (and his closest aides) had privately disparaged Smith's own abilities and record as governor? Did he resent what he regarded as Roosevelt's sense of social superiority and intellectual condescension toward Smith, things that Roosevelt sometimes had failed to hide successfully? Did he believe so fervently in the need to end prohibition that he could not countenance Roosevelt's "dodges" on the issue, as he had recommended that Smith do when the Mullan-Gage Act repeal was before him in 1922? Did he miss the political arena and, perhaps out of boredom with his sterile life in business, re-enter politics because that is what he knew best? Or did he want to make one last, desperate effort to disprove his own opinion that

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<sup>79</sup> Raskob believed that Roosevelt had benefited in 1930 from the votes of anti-Catholics in upstate New York who had voted against Smith in his earlier races, and Smith quite possibly agreed with this analysis. Roosevelt appears to have harbored his own resentments. He told Hull in 1931 that Smith and his circle had never accepted him. "I could work hard for him ... but I was always on the outside, never on the inside, with him." A proud man himself, Roosevelt must have chafed under the leadership of Smith, whose political acumen Roosevelt came to question – and whose somewhat patronizing attitude toward Roosevelt he must have found irritating. The result was, as Oscar Handlin put it succinctly, a "mutual resentment."

<sup>80</sup> Walter Lippmann's comments underestimating Roosevelt and his ability or backbone are well known, but there were many others. A sample would include those by Samuel I. Rosenman, Allen Nevins, Rexford Tugwell, William Gibbs McAdoo, Henry L. Mencken (who said that "even McAdoo is worth a dozen Franklin D. Roosevelts"), Newton D. Baker, Frank R. Kent, William E. Dodd, Bruce Barton (who rather cruelly described Roosevelt as "just a name and a crutch"), Frank R. Kent, Samuel B. Bledsoe – and even Roosevelt's old boss, Josephus Daniels.

“There’s no chance for a Catholic to be President. Not in my lifetime.... I can’t win against the bigots”?

These questions can never get definitive answers, but there is one source through which Smith speaks, at least indirectly. That source is his daughter, Emily Smith Warner, whose biography of her father has both an insider’s perspective and insights into his thinking. According to her (no fan of Roosevelt herself, it should be said), Smith during 1931 became increasingly concerned about his successor’s approach to government. In Smith’s eyes, Roosevelt had a tendency to put political considerations over principles and the public interest – to be, well, *expedient*.<sup>81</sup> In addition, he relied less on close study of issues (Smith’s own forte) and more on instinct and intuition (and, others would add, his hunches and personal charm). As governor, too, Roosevelt had begun to listen to the kind of woolly-minded academic theorists, some of them with truly radical thoughts, that Smith had always abhorred. Smith also came to realize, surely in part through his own experience, that Roosevelt could be evasive and vindictive. And whereas Roosevelt had actively cultivated Smith when the latter was governor, now that their positions were reversed he seemed bent on asserting his independence. Even the two men’s class differences helped create a difference between them: the parvenu Smiths would never be on the same level as the Roosevelts, no matter how much money they now had, and some members of Smith’s family seem to have sensed an attitude of social superiority among the Roosevelts.

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<sup>81</sup> Surely Smith by now had concluded that Roosevelt did not share his own view that prohibition was an issue demanding a firm stand for a principle. Instead, Roosevelt would likely look for the expedient way out.

No single incident had led Smith to oppose Roosevelt, Warner wrote, but by the end of 1931 he became receptive, first, to overtures from the “stop-Roosevelt” movement that many of his friends were involved in, and then to appeals that he allow his name to be put forth as an alternative to Roosevelt. The account of Smith’s daughter is colored by her father’s experience with Roosevelt as president, but it rings true when compared to Smith’s own behavior and comments during Roosevelt’s second term in Albany. Whatever Smith actually felt during that period, he was determined to use whatever influence he had within the Democratic Party to secure a wet plank in 1932, along with a candidate who could run on it without embarrassment. Until Roosevelt acted to frustrate Raskob’s plans in early 1931, Smith probably assumed, like everyone else, that he would be in Roosevelt’s corner when it came to the Democratic nomination. Now he was less sure of that, but he was still not a candidate himself.

By the summer of 1931, as Roosevelt continued to gain ground (his backers claimed 800 delegates by then), it looked like the presidential sweepstakes might nearly be over. Still Smith was silent, except to deny that he was out of the running. An enigmatic silence remained his best course, no matter what he ultimately decided he wanted to do. In general, it offered him the most flexibility: Smith kept open the option of becoming an official candidate, obviously, but the very prospect that he would do so meant he would retain his influence as long as possible. If he were to endorse Roosevelt now, a year before the convention, the nomination would be a foregone conclusion and Smith’s views would count for nothing. If he came out against Roosevelt, on the other hand, he would do nothing more – at this point – than fire a small and ineffective shot across his

adversary's bow while accelerating the movement to Roosevelt. He had already given his enemies some joy by announcing in November 1928 that he would not run for office again; why give them further satisfaction now? Better that he should husband his choices and wait to see what would develop.

The dispute during the fall of 1931 about reforestation marked a significant turning point. Smith, now convinced that Roosevelt was not reliable on prohibition, seems to have decided that he definitely must be kept from the presidential nomination. Here was where Smith's remaining influence could be a decisive factor, but he was reluctant to be a candidate himself. Smith had certainly been aware of the stop-Roosevelt movement – several his closest political friends were involved and he might have attended some of their meetings, but he had been reluctant to listen to its overtures that he lend his name to this movement or take an active role in devising a long-term strategy. As he told his daughter, he did not want to ask his friends to contribute to another Smith presidential campaign. (The debts, both the known ones carried by the National Committee and the unpublicized ones that Raskob was carrying, remained substantial.) Then there was the possibility that the issue of his religion would flare up again, at least as badly as in 1928. Besides, he told her, having been a candidate for the nomination in 1920 and 1924, and then the nominee in 1928, he “didn't want to be the Bryan of the party.”

Smith's discussions with not only Raskob but with others had brought a different strategy to the fore. Those opposed to Roosevelt would encourage favorite sons and uninstructed delegations, then hope for a deadlock at the national convention – at that time, still

operating under the two-thirds rule for a nomination, after which they would propose an acceptable wet candidate as a compromise solution. It would be 1924 all over again. The principal compromise candidates whose names usually surfaced in political speculation were Young of General Electric, former Governor (and 1920 presidential nominee) James M. Cox of Ohio, Governor Albert C. Ritchie of Maryland, former Governor Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, and former Wilson Cabinet member Newton D. Baker, now an attorney in Cleveland. It is no coincidence that as a group these men were not only unfriendly to prohibition but also considerably more conservative, economically, than Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>82</sup>

The problem with this strategy was twofold: Roosevelt's strength was growing very fast, and it was increasingly problematical whether a patchwork quilt of favorite sons and the prospect of a possible but unidentified compromise candidate could stop his juggernaut. Now, it appeared, Smith would have to take a more active role than he had anticipated. The New York Times stated in an editorial that there was only one possible center if the anti-Roosevelt forces were to succeed in stopping him, and that center was Smith. The pressure on him to make a choice – toss in with Roosevelt or toss his own hat in – was growing: Smith himself said he was “nearly bombarded” by those wanting him to run. (He did not mention the ones that might be urging him to “do the handsome thing” and endorse Roosevelt.) Smith and his friends, though, had evidently decided that even

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<sup>82</sup> Ritchie may have felt that he had let Smith have the presidential nomination in 1928 with the understanding that it was his own turn in 1932. He had the advantage of being friendly with Smith and his advisors, and he was an ardent wet with no major liabilities – unless one considers a colorless personality and speaking style a liability. The names of other possibilities were heard – Representative John Nance Garner of Texas, for one, and even William Gibbs McAdoo – but Baker, Ritchie, and Young were thought to be the leading possibilities. There are indications in his files that Raskob may have been cultivating Byrd as a possible compromise choice. Baker's own favorite was Young.

Smith could not stop Roosevelt, and neither could they endorse anyone else without risking coalescing their own opponents behind Roosevelt. Thus the stop-Roosevelt Democrats had modified their strategy somewhat: Smith would indeed become a candidate, but he would only collect delegates from where he was popular, mainly in the Northeast and in certain other urban areas (Chicago, for instance) in preparation for turning them over to the compromise candidate at the convention.

Who would that compromise candidate be? In the eyes of many of those opposing Roosevelt, Baker was the most promising choice. The Clevelander was not without presidential ambitions, but he had made up his mind not to be an active candidate in 1932 and to avoid the nomination if he “honorably could.” For one thing, Baker had had a heart attack while campaigning for Smith in 1928, so there was some question about his ability to undertake a presidential campaign. More importantly, Baker was an internationalist who had been a champion of the League of Nations for over a decade, and this was certain to antagonize many persons in both parties if he were now to become a legitimate contender for the White House.<sup>83</sup> Even more consequential was Baker’s recognition that if he challenged Roosevelt openly he would, even with substantial accretions from the New York governor’s enemies, only capture enough delegates to ensure that the convention would turn to someone other than him or Roosevelt. Baker

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<sup>83</sup> Belle Moskowitz indirectly counseled Baker to tone down his public support for the League and diversify his messages to include such topics as industrial problems. In late January 1932, Baker did publicly express his opposition to a pro-League plank in the 1932 Democratic platform. Beyond this one legitimate issue on which Baker was regarded as vulnerable, there was a canard that he was part Jewish.

was, though, willing to serve as that possible compromise figure himself if that would preserve the unity of his party and bring it victory in 1932.<sup>84</sup>

Without wholly losing their interest in several other possible compromise candidates, the stop-Roosevelt forces evidently decided sometime in the summer 1931 that Baker should be approached first.<sup>85</sup> In mid-August of that year, Shouse began the courtship of Baker by inquiring about his availability. Presumably Baker agreed to listen, for by early September he was hearing from New York City that Smith would ultimately throw “every particle of strength he can muster” to Baker, resulting in the latter’s drafted by the convention. Having received these assurances from Smith and his friends that they would back him, Baker then went to Washington, D.C., later in September, met there with Shouse, and consented to accept such a draft.

Although no extant document verifies that Baker personally agreed to be the stop-Roosevelt movement’s compromise candidate, his behavior and the testimony of other persons certainly indicate that he did so. Baker concurred with the stop-Roosevelt strategy, which was to continue to encourage a plethora of favorite-son candidates and where possible uninstructed delegations – and to defend the two-thirds rule – so that the 1932 convention would be, in their terms, “open” (that is, not with the delegates already pledged to Roosevelt). Negotiations between New York and Cleveland would continue behind the scenes for several more months (as late as the last part of October 1931, Smith

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<sup>84</sup> There is ample evidence that Roosevelt, along with many of those supporting him, regarded Baker as an able man and an acceptable nominee should the New York governor’s candidacy fall short. Interestingly, Baker also had solid support among Republicans, so he could have been a formidable nominee.

<sup>85</sup> Belle Moskowitz was in contact with Ritchie, who may have been seen by the stop-Roosevelt group and Smith circles as the best second choice.

had yet not joined Raskob and Shouse in committing to Baker). Baker continued to hear assurances that Smith and his circle preferred him to anyone else, along with suggestions about the stance he should take – for now – as an ostensible non-candidate.<sup>86</sup> The negotiations were usually carried on – often by means of coded correspondence – through Baker’s close friend and former assistant Hayes, whose law office was in New York City, but there were personal meetings as well. To others, Baker maintained a stance of deniability when it came to the actions of Hayes, later stating that he was only “half-conscious” or “largely unaware” of what Hayes was doing – allegedly on his own – for Baker. The indirect contacts between Smith’s camp and Baker would continue during the first half of 1932.

During this period of late 1931, Smith’s possible availability as a candidate continued to dominate the political news. In what looked to be a final effort to avoid a breach, Smith and Roosevelt met on November 18 for two hours, at the latter’s invitation and home on East 65th Street. Although the meeting was at first described to reporters as non-political (Roosevelt insisted that he and Smith had gotten together often, without publicity, on the former’s previous trips to New York City), Roosevelt’s invitation to Smith cited the state budget as the topic. The Governor had decided against his advisors’ recommendation that he ask Smith directly about his plans: his stratagem was to maneuver Smith into initiating the breach.<sup>87</sup> Roosevelt’s ulterior motive in meeting may well have been to defuse any hint of discord between the two men so that he could continue to woo Smith’s

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<sup>86</sup> Another key supporter of Baker was the publisher Roy W. Howard of the Scripps-Howard chain, who was in frequent contact with Smith and served as an intermediary between the two men.

<sup>87</sup> Smith’s handwritten reply was addressed “Dear Governor.”

erstwhile supporters. In any case, he kept the discussion on the state budget and ducked his guest's attempts to get into politics.

This might have been the last straw for Smith, who had been expecting Roosevelt to extend an olive branch in search of a reconciliation and now had lined up Baker as a viable alternative.<sup>88</sup> Within weeks he began to confer with potential allies – Boss Anton J. Cermak of Chicago, New Jersey's Hague, Governor Joseph B. Ely of Massachusetts, and others (including of course Raskob and Shouse) – about how to proceed. His friends were soon spreading the word that any Democrat could win in 1932<sup>89</sup> and that Smith had enough strength in the Northeastern states to win the election even if he lost all of the South this time. (The real problem for Smith, of course, would be persuading two-thirds of the national convention to give him the nomination.) Roosevelt's friends blamed Smith's actions on selfishness and petulance, suggesting that he felt he was owed the nomination or that he was put out because as the party's titular leader he should have been consulted more. They welcomed his likely candidacy, though, because they said it could only help their own man: the stronger the stop-Roosevelt movement grew, the more Roosevelt would be able to attract those who wanted victory in 1932 at any price.

Friends of both men despaired at the situation and what it might mean to the Democrats' chances in 1932. One of them was Clark Howell, a Georgian, who met with Smith on December 2. When Howell asked the question point-blank, Smith did not rule out

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<sup>88</sup> At about the same time, while Shouse was a weekend guest at Hyde Park Roosevelt and Howe (Shouse said) joked about how they had dissembled to a visiting political delegation. The disgusted Shouse later reported this to Smith.

<sup>89</sup> In Howe's opinion, this assertion was doing harm to Roosevelt's cause.

backing Roosevelt but emphasized that he would support “the man who seems best for the party.” When Howell asked Smith if there was personal hostility between the two men, Smith denied it<sup>90</sup> but went on to say that Roosevelt “has never consulted me about a damn thing since he was been Governor.... He has ignored me!” In addition to taking bad advice, some of it from persons unfriendly to Smith, Roosevelt, Smith continued, had “invited me to his house [on November 18] and did not even mention to me the subject of his candidacy.” Smith also told Howell that Roosevelt was “trimming” on prohibition, on which Smith said he wanted a “showdown” in 1932. Before parting, he told Howell that it was too soon to commit for or against Roosevelt and that he would take his time before disclosing what he was going to do.<sup>91</sup>

Before long, though, Smith’s friends were describing a groundswell of support asking him to be a candidate in the state primaries in order to stop Roosevelt, as he had McAdoo in 1924. Smith was the center of political attention – will he run, or not? On Jackson Day in early January 1932, he addressed a large and enthusiastic Democratic gathering in the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C., and a national radio audience. (In a break with the past, only the three former presidential candidates – no future ones – were invited to speak here.) In his remarks, Smith scoffed at the G.O.P.’s boast that it was the party of prosperity, emphasized the need to deal with unemployment, called the economic

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<sup>90</sup> In a fragment of a script for a radio address, presumably in 1932, Smith repeats these charges while reviewing his entire political relationship with Roosevelt from 1918 onward. He emphasized the point here that he could not let his personal friendship affect his decision about a political candidacy, a point he also made to Eleanor Roosevelt in early 1936.

<sup>91</sup> Strictly speaking, Smith’s allegation that Roosevelt had never consulted with him is not correct. For instance, he had just the previous month (on November 11, 1931) invited Smith to Albany in order to confer on the budget. Smith was looking back on three years of what he undoubtedly saw as lost opportunities. His daughter stated in 1968 that “there was never a chance” that Smith would have supported Roosevelt in 1932.

situation a “state of war,” advocated the use of bonds to pay for expanded public works – and pointedly described the costs and lost revenue of prohibition. Smith’s vigorous speech, which both attacked Hoover’s presidency and offered constructive proposals for dealing with the national economic crisis, must have sounded much like a campaign address to many of his listeners in the capital and elsewhere. If the 1928 nominee intended to seek the party’s nod again in 1932, however, he was not yet ready to tip his hand.

Later in January, Smith spoke in Boston. He did not refer in his remarks to his political plans, but friends allowed that Smith would not object to the use of his name in the upcoming primaries; slowly, it seemed, he was inching toward becoming a candidate, at least of some sort. When someone in the Boston audience arose and proposed drafting Smith for the nomination, he only bowed and smiled. When the audience enthusiastically seconded the suggestion, he stood again and did the same. More persuasively, perhaps, Smith’s many friends in the state’s Democratic Party were also urging him to run again. Smith seemed to enjoy the attention he was getting in this city, where he had received such warm welcomes before – this was the kind of stage he was used to. But he would not reveal anything. “When that decision is made it will not be in a railroad depot,” Smith told reporters as he was boarding a train for home.

On January 23, Roosevelt authorized the use of his name in the North Dakota primary, confirming what had been obvious to any informed observer for at least two years: he would be a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1932. Surely for Al

Smith this was definitely the final straw: his friend and successor had told the American people of his intentions before he had informed the man who had made him governor – as Roosevelt could have done just a few weeks earlier in their private meeting. In any case, Roosevelt’s candidacy was an added inducement for Smith to make up his mind what to do. As it happened, it was the situation in New Hampshire (not Massachusetts) whose timing acted to force Smith’s hand. The Granite State had a February 18 deadline for its primary, then only a shadow of what it would become later in the century but in this instance perhaps a decisive shadow.

A sense of suspended animation held as Smith seemingly pondered what to do. Stirrings of activity on his behalf were observed in several states, including Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. There were calls for Smith and Roosevelt to get together and resolve their differences before it was too late. At this juncture, Jim Farley met with Smith – perhaps to sound him out? In fact, Farley was on a personal mission: having heard that Smith had been angered by his former supporter’s “disloyal” work for Roosevelt’s nomination, he wanted to settle the matter with Smith. But the “extremely cordial” Smith amicably gave Farley his blessing, as he had other close colleagues in New York – Herbert Lehman and Ed Flynn, for instance, who wanted to work for Roosevelt’s nomination but had felt some obligation to sound out Smith first.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Flynn does not date his own visit to Smith, but it must have been in 1931 as he says he did not learn of Roosevelt’s presidential plans until November 1930. According to Flynn, Smith showed him a drawer of debts brought about by family members (primarily Alfred E. Smith, Jr., it would appear) investing in the stock market and the financial embarrassment of County Trust Company (which led Smith’s friend James J. Riordan to take his own life in November 1931), then said “no one could induce him to enter the political arena again.” Another who called on Smith in 1931, Joseph F. Guffey of Pennsylvania, did so in January of that year. Smith first declared it was too early to say but when pressed went on to tell Guffey that he would not be a candidate again “if I have to encounter the same religious bigotry I did the last time.” Smith’s financial picture evidently improved significantly between Flynn’s visit and the end of February

Smith appears to have held it against Roosevelt that he had not taken a similar step in 1930 or even 1931. “If he had come to me and given his reasons for believing I was not available and pressing his own claims for preference,” Smith told Cox in early 1932, “we could have talked it over and might have come to a satisfactory understanding.” “Might have” is not “could have,” though: Smith also told the former Ohio governor that “by all the rules of the political game” he deserved another nomination, so there is no guarantee that the two men would have been able to settle their off-setting claims for priority in 1932 in private. But now a different meaning of “might” was to come into play: the might of numbers. Smith had made up his mind, reluctantly if we are to believe the many witnesses, to become a candidate for the presidency again.

Early in February, Smith made it known that he would make his intentions public on February 6. On the afternoon of that day, a Saturday, reporters were handed a brief, written statement printed on his letterhead. “If the Democratic National Convention . . . should decide it wants me to lead,” the statement read, “I will make the fight; but I will not make a pre-convention campaign to secure the support of delegates.” The announcement, which Commonweal called “almost as cryptic as it was clear,” was indeed full of such ambiguous language – which seems to have been exactly what Smith had intended. The carefully crafted statement, by not disclosing what Smith actually intended to do in the months ahead, had achieved his purpose by keeping ajar the door leading to a full-scale candidacy.

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1932, as he told a correspondent then that he had scraped together enough money to pay off his personal debts.

And even though Smith's statement also declared that as the leader of his party he "would not support or oppose the candidacy of any aspirant," it was difficult not to believe that he regarded his statement of availability more as a move to ensure that he would be able to influence the choice of the party's nominee rather than as a serious effort to obtain the nomination for himself. After all, as the respected pundit for New Republic, T.R.B., pointed out, if Smith could block Roosevelt then surely the more powerful Roosevelt could keep him from the nomination as well. But at least Smith had said he was willing to become a presidential candidate again and would not stop the use of his name in primaries. Although Smith's announcement had not been made in a railroad depot it had been made with as much drama as a track change announcement in one, but it was the signal that his friends had long been waiting for.

Who would have predicted, just three years earlier, that the political fates of Al Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt would have become entangled in such a peculiar way? The Smith boom in late 1931 and early 1932 was, as one writer described it, "the reluctant and somewhat unnatural parent of the Roosevelt boom," whereas the Roosevelt boom was "the somewhat unfilial child of the Smith boom." Which of the two men, many people seemed to be wondering, was the ingrate – or perhaps the greater ingrate? Not since the break between the other Roosevelt, Theodore, and his protégé and successor William Howard Taft had there been anything like it. It had all the makings of a Greek tragedy.

In Massachusetts, the sensational news that Smith created by way of his announcement on February 6 resulted, of course, in an immediate groundswell of popular and political support for him. Elsewhere, interpretations of what he had said, and the possible implications, ran the gamut. Many observers welcomed what they regarded as Smith's announcement that he would become a candidate, whereas others greeted with dismay the news that he was now interested in being the Democratic nominee in 1932. Still others, though, read Smith's careful and enigmatic statement as an indication he would *not* be launching an active candidacy for the nomination – or might only make himself available to a desperate and deadlocked party that needed him as its leader again.<sup>93</sup> The careful statement was, perhaps, a bit too carefully written to be enable the reader to grasp Smith's real intentions – or was that the intent?

What was clear now, though, was that there would be some kind of a contest for the Democratic nomination, and by rallying those opposed to the New York governor Smith would at least ensure the prize did not go to Roosevelt by default. Few onlookers were willing to predict that Smith could actually win the nomination. “If Smith himself thinks so,” wrote Frank R. Kent, “then he has completely lost his sense of reality.” He might well succeed in blocking Roosevelt and, perhaps, then forcing a compromise candidate of his choice on the party. But there was a widespread suspicion that by issuing such an enigmatic statement and authorizing such a low-key campaign at this late date Smith signaled he intended to be only a spoiler, not a serious candidate. In their public

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<sup>93</sup> Notre Dame University, doubtless hoping to capitalize upon Smith's increased visibility, was interested in having Smith give its commencement address in 1932, but nothing came of the idea. The university had invited him to dedicate its stadium in 1931, but the university's president ruefully remembered that this invitation was “not received [by Smith] with perfect grace” and said he wanted to avoid another interview like that one. The university had awarded Smith its Laetare Medal in 1929.

comments, members of the Roosevelt camp echoed this suspicion but also admitted that they might have a hard battle ahead.<sup>94</sup>

Many Southern and Western Democrats in particular feared that Smith's nomination, if it were to come about, could mean another unpleasant bout with the religious issue, and also with prohibition in 1932. What was worse for a party that craved harmony after the turmoil and defections of 1928, there could be renewed division within the party that would have repercussions in November: "...if Al Smith gives out any more interviews or makes any more speeches," one Democrat wrote, "it will make the election for the present administration sure." (Many Republicans must have agreed, for they were described as "elated" at the prospect of Smith's candidacy.) The Democrats had taken their licks four years before by nominating Smith; why should they do so again this year?

However equivocal Smith's statement had been, one more thing was obvious: there could be little doubt now that Smith and Roosevelt were not playing a public game of charades in order to hide the latter's alliance with Tammany Hall and secure the Democratic nomination for Roosevelt: they were now on a collision course. The worry that was growing in the minds of many observers, whomever they supported, was whether the two men would in 1932 become the McAdoo and Smith of 1924: bitter enemies who would not countenance each other's victory. Would their struggle produce the same outcome this time around?

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<sup>94</sup> Thus it is no surprise that when Houghton-Mifflin asked in early 1932 whether Roosevelt had any use for 1,704 copies of his slender publication, The Happy Warrior, his paean to Smith in 1924 that was distributed in 1928, a very firm "no" was the answer.

## The Battle for the Nomination

Thus Al Smith's entry, however qualified, into the contest for the 1932 Democratic nomination both crystallized and obscured things. There could no longer be any doubt that Smith would become a participant, rather than a mere spectator, in the first heat of America's greatest quadrennial indoor sport: who would the Democrats choose as their entry in the presidential sweepstakes? The question that would continue to dominate discussion during the six months leading up to the party's convention in Chicago in late June was how *active* a player Smith would be. Did he intend to seek the prize for himself, if not at first then perhaps when a thoroughly wet convention came to see him as their hero? Was he in the race (or ready to run) only to give his friends the chance to avoid having to back Roosevelt? Was he hoping merely to focus the sentiments of the anti-Roosevelt Democrats until he could hand off the baton of his strength – thought to be most of the delegates from Northeastern cities and a few others from cities elsewhere – to another runner, as yet unknown? This contest, Smith's last as a candidate for office, would see these questions answered; its outcome would also do much to define the remainder of his political life.

Smith's motives and innermost thoughts during this critical period can only be imputed, but the testimony of those who knew him well, along with the judgment of those who observed him, indicates that he did know he could not be renominated in 1932 but felt obliged to make the effort – to give his loyal followers a voice, to offer Democrats an alternative to the frontrunner, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and to promote the values and

issues that he held dear. This effort would compel him to walk like a real candidate and talk like a real candidate, however sincere a one he intended to be. Slowly but surely, once Smith allowed that he would make himself available, as his February statement had stated, he would be drawn deeper into the contest for the nomination until he was fully committed to it. The risk was that Smith might find himself unable to detach himself from the emotional commitment he had made and to take himself out of the race just as he was approaching the finish line. Would Al Smith come to believe that he could emerge as the nominee and thereby gain vindication for his loss in 1928?

Smith's immediate focus during February and March of 1932, though, was on planning for the months of pre-convention activities that lay ahead. This meant deciding which primaries he should enter, continuing to consult with the others who had come together in order to stop Roosevelt, making sure that his views on various topics gained notice, and settling upon a strategy to employ at the national convention itself. Through it all, as Smith's fortunes waxed and waned, he would have to walk a fine line between putting up too little opposition to Roosevelt (which would call into question Smith's very legitimacy as a candidate) and being too successful (which had the risk of driving to Roosevelt those who feared another Smith run for the presidency). Nor was he the only player in this drama, for Roosevelt could be counted upon to exercise strategy of his own, and other candidates might prove to be surprisingly resourceful – and successful. And then there was Tammany Hall to think about. With two heavyweight contenders from New York, one an alumnus of the machine (though not necessarily its friend now) and the other the current governor (no friend but a man possessing considerable influence over its

interests) Tammany would have some tough decisions to make. All this would make the first half of 1932 an eventful period for Al Smith.

Those seeking to block Roosevelt from the 1932 nomination had for many months been employing a strategy that included encouraging favorite sons where possible and urging uninstructed delegations elsewhere; their hope was that the New York governor would be unable to secure the necessary two-thirds prior to the convention. Here, using their control of the party's machinery, the stop-Roosevelt Democrats would be able to combine Smith's strength with that of the favorite sons, deadlock the convention, and, when the delegates grew impatient with this situation, propose an acceptable compromise candidate – perhaps Baker, perhaps someone else. As the weeks passed and Roosevelt grew stronger, those seeking to stop him adjusted their strategy accordingly. Smith's candidacy would play an important role in this developing situation, but so would continuing skepticism about whether or not he was a “serious” candidate.

Smith had said in his February 6 announcement that he was available. But what did that really mean? He was given a chance to clarify his intentions almost immediately, as the consequence of a chance (and overtly cordial) encounter with Roosevelt at a New York City funeral two days later.<sup>95</sup> Roosevelt invited Smith to talk, and the two men got together for an hour at the former's Manhattan home. Emerging from this meeting, Smith stated that he would not be conducting an “active” campaign – establishing a headquarters and soliciting support as he had in 1924 – but was positioning himself as he had in 1920, when his campaign was mostly symbolic. He declared that he would have

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<sup>95</sup> The occasion was the funeral of John R. Voorhis, an ancient Grand Sachem of Tammany Hall.

nothing more to say, perhaps until June. Smith maintained that he was not aiming to block anyone, and the low-key campaign that he was depicting seemed to foretell little more than another symbolic gesture that would hardly make a difference in the outcome.<sup>96</sup>

Whether Smith's stance at this point was genuine or a smokescreen is uncertain – Roosevelt described it as “the general mix-up over [his] active or inactive candidacy.” It seems possible that Smith had not thoroughly thought through his intentions and plans, but it may be that he dissembled on February 8 because he was not ready to announce them.<sup>97</sup> His seemingly friendly meeting with Roosevelt, and his subsequent statements, did relieve somewhat the anxiety his recent announcement had caused for Democrats who feared another bitter battle within the party. Perhaps all Smith had wanted, some observers suggested, was a little attention and the appearance of being a factor in his party's choice of a nominee.

Soon, however, circumstances forced Smith to rethink, or at least reclarify, his status. Formal consent would be needed in certain states if slates of delegates pledged to him were to appear on the ballots there. One of these states was Massachusetts, where it was obvious Smith was at least as popular as he was in his home state – perhaps more so, in fact. His 1930 speaking engagements had reaffirmed Smith's hold on the state, and many

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<sup>96</sup> As the New York Times pointed out, by the very fact that Smith was not *for* Roosevelt meant that he was against him.

<sup>97</sup> February 8 was not the only time the two men got together, face to face. Smith traveled to Albany a month later, on March 4, and he and Roosevelt had what was described as a long talk. The only topic that was announced was state matters. Between these two conversations, Roosevelt had seemed to go out of his way to praise Smith and his gubernatorial administration. The Governor said he and his predecessor were the best of friends – “extraordinary friends,” in fact. There is no record that they met again before the national convention in late June.

of the state's political leaders, including Governor Joseph B. Ely, appeared to be potential allies. If Roosevelt chose to contest the Bay State, its primary in late April might be critical to the effort to stop him. Factional disputes within Massachusetts, where Boston's Mayor James M. Curley was a passionate supporter of the New York governor and Curley's enemies were forced to back Smith whether they liked him or not, helped to give the state's primary even more visibility as a test of strength.<sup>98</sup> A similar situation was developing in New Hampshire, where Smith's optimistic supporters were urging him to authorize pledged delegates in that state's primary.

If Smith refused to permit slates of delegates pledged to him in these two states, his decision would disappoint his friends there and seemed sure to cost him support; what was worse, many of the potentially pro-Smith Democrats might turn to Roosevelt instead. Some erosion in Smith's support had become apparent even during Smith's weeks of delay in deciding what to do, and Roosevelt's surprisingly easy victory in Maine in March showed that the Smith forces could not be complacent about his own strength in the Northeast. At the same time, if Smith threw himself fully into the races in New Hampshire and Massachusetts he would risk driving Democrats who feared his renomination to Roosevelt and possibly alienate others who were working to prevent Roosevelt's nomination.

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<sup>98</sup> Rumors that opposition to Smith's religion would drive votes to Roosevelt could not but have helped Smith to decide that he should fight for Massachusetts. (On one occasion, Smith stated that he entered the 1932 primary in Massachusetts because his backers there were bitter about his defeat in 1928.) Discussions about simply dividing the state's delegates between Smith and Roosevelt came to nothing, perhaps because Curley, backed by Howe and James Roosevelt, demanded that Smith's delegates be pledged to Roosevelt if the latter were to win and then accused Smith of misrepresenting his intentions. There was some latent Roosevelt support among the Smith delegates, but the deep divisions within the state party produced much intransigence and Smith held onto most of the votes until the bitter end.

At conference of Smith and his advisors, including Jersey City's Mayor Frank Hague (who was largely responsible for contacting key Democratic leaders around the country on Smith's behalf), on March 29 finally produced a decision: Smith would give his formal approval for a slate of pledged delegates in both Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and he would also file petitions in Pennsylvania to get himself on the ballot there. Hague, who in actuality supported Smith only for lack of a better candidate, had been "deeply distressed" by the passive nature of Smith's candidacy and by his equivocal statements to this point. Meanwhile, Belle Moskowitz had made a visit to Baker in Ohio in mid-February, probably to make sure that he understood the true nature of the expanded candidacy that Smith was considering – and to make sure, too, that Baker would continue to be available as a potential compromise once Roosevelt was stopped.

Meanwhile, stirrings were also visible in other states whose primaries and party conventions would determine who would vote for the nominee in Chicago. Among the states without primaries but with favorite sons (Illinois, for instance), Smith was thought to have strong support as a secondary candidate, but gauging that strength would be difficult. In other states, though, primary elections through the spring and early summer would provide tangible evidence of Smith's progress as a candidate. The key states with primaries included Pennsylvania, where Smith was thought to have significant strength; California, where his support among the state's relatively few Democrats was also evident; and Wisconsin, where opposition to prohibition was thought to give Smith an edge. Other Northeastern states – New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Vermont, and Maine, along with Minnesota, would also be interesting contests for those watching to

see how high Smith's star would rise in 1932. But – not for the last time in American political history – it would be tiny New Hampshire that, owing to the calendar – would make the first news of the primary season when it elected its delegates to the national convention.

The season did not start out well for Smith and his friends. Despite an intensive last-minute campaign by those pledged to him, it was Roosevelt who swept the New Hampshire primary, which happened to be held on town-meeting day: the pro-Roosevelt rural towns overwhelmed the outnumbered Smith voters in the state's small cities, principally Manchester. Nearly all of the proposed delegates on Smith's slate represented that city, not the rest of the state, and his late, poorly organized campaign, somewhat inept anyway, was outsmarted by Roosevelt's. In fact, Smith had been ill-advised to enter this state's primary at all, and his stance as merely someone with whom Roosevelt's enemies could block him did not make for an appealing or sturdy platform on which to build a candidacy. The effect of this initial defeat was to raise, again not for the last time in American political history, rumblings that the defeat would drive the losing candidate out of the presidential race. Instead, it made Smith and his friends bank more on the outcomes in Massachusetts and elsewhere.

Indeed, Smith's zest for political combat seemed to be on the rise: accusing Curley of misrepresenting him as not a candidate, on March 10 Smith informed his supporters in Massachusetts that he would indeed run if the national convention wished him to and declared that he was ready to do battle for the presidency again; his consent to a list of

delegates was, Smith said, not inconsistent with the statement about his availability he had made in early February.<sup>99</sup> Then, responding to a query from the daughter of Woodrow Wilson, he dodged the question of whether his delegates should back Roosevelt if the Governor were to win the Massachusetts primary, saying only that they would be free to act as they wished. (As for himself, Smith said he was not prepared to say who he might favor.) Smith steadfastly refused to campaign personally in the state, though, believing that doing so *would* be inconsistent with his February statement.

But Curley was not the only one asking these questions. Reports that pro-Roosevelt Democrats in California were saying that Smith was not a serious candidate, inquiries from a group of Connecticut mayors about the absence of any active campaign for Smith there, and rumors in Pennsylvania that Smith was merely a stalking horse either for or against Roosevelt were among those questions. Then there was the comment from Smith's ally from 1928, Senator Key Pittman, that Smith's "selfish" friends were pushing him into what Pittman called a "humiliating" position. Pittman allowed that it was proper for Smith to have issued his February statement about his availability and his willingness to lead the party if chosen. But, Pittman added, Smith should not become an active candidate because he could not win. Pittman had intended to nudge Smith toward making a "graceful exit" from the presidential race after his two disappointments, not only in New Hampshire but in Wisconsin (which Roosevelt had also won decisively). Smith not only ignored the hint – he raised the stakes. When he clarified his status once

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<sup>99</sup> At about the same time, apparently concerned that the question Curley had raised might raise eyebrows elsewhere, Smith cabled friends in Wisconsin and Minnesota that he would not withdraw his candidacy before the national convention. He also denied reports that he had a secret arrangement with any of the candidates to accept a cabinet post in return for dropping out.

again, the next day, Smith declared that he was in the race to stay: he would accept the nomination, he welcomed support, and he was not a stalking horse for anyone else.

When primary day came in the Bay State, it was Smith's day. He won the state handily, although savvy observers also pointed out that the tally was as much a rebuke to Curley as a victory for Smith. In this instance, it was the Roosevelt camp that had erred. Having accepted the controversial Curley as their champion, they foolishly had alienated a sizeable portion of the state's other key Democrats, many of whom were inclined toward the New York governor but had to oppose him because they detested Curley – and also feared the wrath of the numerous voters who were loyal to Smith. Roosevelt had needlessly alienated those voters as well, and this might hurt him in November. Even knowing Smith's deep reservoir of support in Massachusetts, the Roosevelt camp had forged ahead, perhaps hoping to nip what Louis Howe caustically termed Smith "fake" candidacy in the bud.

When the Massachusetts primary results were in and Roosevelt had not just lost to Smith but had been trounced three to one, Roosevelt's manager, Jim Farley, put the best face on his candidate's smarting defeat – which was mostly a psychological one, given Smith's well-known popularity in the state. Farley told reporters that when any hope of a deal between the two New Yorkers had fallen through, Roosevelt's friends had decided to go ahead with the fight in order to demonstrate to the rest of the nation that he had significant support even in Smith's best state, Massachusetts.<sup>100</sup> Smith himself was,

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<sup>100</sup> Farley said that he had offered no contest to the Smith forces if the delegates to be chosen would be obliged to say who they would support if Smith were out of the presidential race. This the Smith forces

naturally, ebullient at his stunning victory. “It ought,” he said, “to put a chock under the Roosevelt band wagon and stop people from jumping on it, on the theory there is nowhere else to go.” Smith’s decision to enter the presidential race, even at a late date, seemed to have been vindicated.

Most commentators had been expecting Smith to carry Massachusetts – only the extent of his victory seemed uncertain. Political attention therefore turned to the primaries in two other apparently key states that were less predictable: the first was Pennsylvania, also set for the end of April, and then California, whose primary would be held early the next month. Smith had filed petitions in March to get on the ballot in the Keystone State, which was beginning to look like a primary Roosevelt had to win. Here again, Smith did not make a personal appearance; here again, too, intraparty feuding was a factor, but in this case Roosevelt seemed to have a better champion in Joe Guffey than he had had in Curley. In the end, the presidential preference vote in Pennsylvania produced a narrow victory for the Roosevelt campaign, which (in light of Smith’s May victories in Rhode Island and Connecticut) seemed to suggest that Smith’s strength within the party might be concentrated in New England. But the Pennsylvania outcome also showed that Roosevelt could no longer expect to coast to the nomination.<sup>101</sup>

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refused. One result of Roosevelt’s defeat in Massachusetts was a renewed effort to secure instructed delegations for him in the South and West.

<sup>101</sup> Smith’s primary and convention victories in New Jersey, also in May, probably reflected Hague’s iron-fisted control of the Democratic organization in that state as much as they did any affinity for Smith. Vermont went to Roosevelt, but as an uninstructed slate; Delaware went to him as well. Both Wisconsin and Minnesota had also been victories for Roosevelt, in large part because he was so able to draw progressive votes – even wet ones. Illinois, which backed a favorite son, was in fact a potential resource for Smith, especially since the state’s leading Democrat, Cermak, was personally loyal to him. It is an interesting irony that Smith’s fate in the East was largely determined by two solidly Republican states, New Hampshire and Pennsylvania.

That left California, where the situation was complicated by the fact that Garner of Texas was a third candidate, in addition to Smith and Roosevelt. Among the Texan's proponents were McAdoo, now an attorney in Los Angeles, and California-based publisher William Randolph Hearst – both old enemies of Al Smith.<sup>102</sup> This was another instance in which an intraparty struggle for control enveloped the various presidential candidacies, making predictions about the outcome chancy. Many of those who had supported Smith in 1928 were now for Roosevelt. Those challenging the party's leadership were drawn more to Garner than to Roosevelt, perhaps because Hearst's money and newspapers were enlisted in the Texan's behalf. Smith's advocates were mostly nonentities, and outside of the Bay Area he had little support at all. McAdoo campaigned vigorously against his old nemesis, Tammany Hall, and its candidate, Smith.

Garner (with 222,000 votes) did in fact prevail in the May 4 primary, despite having been almost unknown in the state just a short time before, and his presidential candidacy now had to be taken seriously. Roosevelt was in second position (with 175,000), a result that worried his close advisors as they looked ahead to the convention, where Garner might choose to ally himself with the stop-Roosevelt movement. It was Smith and his supporters who were buoyed by the outcome of the California canvass, despite his having trailed Garner and Roosevelt with only 142,000 votes, for now it was obvious that Roosevelt could not win on the first ballot in Chicago. (Even his having a majority of the delegates would not be a guarantee of victory, as both Champ Clark in 1912 and McAdoo in 1924 had been stymied despite their having won majorities of the delegates' votes.)

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<sup>102</sup> Ironically, according to Shouse Garner was also Smith's personal preference among the candidates in 1932.

Shouse had calculated Roosevelt's odds of winning the nomination as two out of three before California had voted, but now he lowered them to even odds. When Smith was asked about his showing in that state's primary, he declared: "The vote I got in California is a personal tribute to me and can be regarded in no other light. I had no organization of my own in the state and the regular Democratic organization was against me." But it was one of Smith's Northeastern proponents, an unnamed member of the House of Representatives, who put his finger on the principal reason for Smith's elation at the results in California: "Mr. Smith's party service this year," he said, "is to keep the party from making a mistake. He has helped mightily to do that with his vote in Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and California." It seemed evident, therefore, that the vote Smith received in California could indeed be regarded in another light.<sup>103</sup>

As for the two candidates' home state, New York, the jury had been out since February as to whether Tammany Hall would end up favoring Roosevelt or Smith.<sup>104</sup> Since the New

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<sup>103</sup> The matter of Smith's Catholicism and whether it was a handicap to his candidacy did crop up in the 1932 primary contests, but mostly it was only a persistent undercurrent. When Roosevelt won over dry delegates despite his wetness, it seemed proof to some persons that religion had been at the base of the opposition to Smith four years before. When Roosevelt gave persons who had been prominent Smith adversaries in 1928 positions in his campaign organization, it seemed proof to Smith that Roosevelt was insensitive to the feelings of him and other Catholics. On the other hand, Smith's support in heavily Catholic areas was sometimes attributed to a desire of his co-religionists to vindicate him and prove that a Catholic could win the presidency, and Joseph B. Ely's criticism of prejudiced Southerners during his nominating speech for Smith in Chicago was only the most widely heard version of the campaign message that many pro-Smith Democrats had been delivering since Smith had put his toe into the presidential contest in February. For the most part, though, 1932 saw only echoes of the fight that had been fought in 1928 – probably because few people gave Smith much of a chance to win the nomination. Doubtless the sometimes-subtle uses of religion by Smith's opponents in 1932 rubbed salt in his old wounds. Ironically, the only overtly "religious issue" that created any stir in 1932 came when Roosevelt was criticized for "weak subservience" to the Roman Catholic Church for having signed a piece of legislation in New York State.

<sup>104</sup> Farley asked Curry in January 1932 to have the New York delegation instructed for Roosevelt, perhaps to head off Smith doing the same, but Curry refused.

York machine, along with some upstate allies, had control of the state Democratic Party organization, where the New York delegation as a whole would come down in Chicago was also open to question. Had Roosevelt won in Massachusetts, Tammany might have bowed to the inevitable and made peace with him. But Smith's victory there, along with his gradual movement toward a genuine candidacy, limited in scope as it might be, was at least giving the New York City machine the opportunity to use him to hold off on any possible endorsement of Roosevelt. Indeed, Curry seemed to be hoping that Tammany's support (and with it the delegation in Chicago) would be a prize that he and Smith would bid for. But Roosevelt was not playing this game: his managers said they could win the nomination without New York, and they counted on Tammany's hostility helping him in the areas of the country where the organization was despised. Curry's comment that the state delegation would be unpledged to either man – and perhaps committed to a non-New Yorker – seemed to be his way of evading a decision and playing for time.

The result of the state's primary election – the delegation seemed to be divided about 60/40 in Smith's favor – did not resolve things. Nor did the state party's April resolution calling for the repeal of prohibition, although it might embarrass Roosevelt somewhat by undermining his assurances to Southerners and Westerners that he was avowedly wet only to please Tammany. Smith's direct attack on Roosevelt at that month's Jefferson Day event (to be discussed later) only complicated Tammany's predicament, for now choosing one of the two New York candidates would most definitely turn the other one into an enemy. Smith also stepped up the pressure on Curry, apparently hoping that he could swing the leader to himself – and hinting that he might be interested in running for

mayor in 1933 if he did not win the presidential nomination. Thus Tammany went from holding a club poised above Roosevelt's head to seeing one, in Smith's hands, held above its own.<sup>105</sup>

Onto this floodlit stage now stepped Seabury, who in May grilled Walker about his beneficences and why he merited them and then, on June 8, 1932 (following a delay for strategic purposes), filed formal charges of criminal malfeasance and nonfeasance against Walker with Roosevelt, who could remove him. The delay came in part from Seabury's desire to put the Governor squarely on the spot in Chicago, but also because he had modest hopes of helping to stop Roosevelt, thereby promoting his own political ambitions – which evidently included becoming Baker's running mate if the convention turned to the Ohioan as its compromise nominee.<sup>106</sup> But neither was Roosevelt eager to see Seabury's investigations place him in a position where he would have to take decisive action on Walker anytime soon. As the Mayor's fate hung in the balance, once again Tammany played for time. Called by Smith to meet with him, Curry and his sidekick, Brooklyn's longtime boss John H. "Uncle John" McCooey, told Smith they would make no commitment except at the convention. Thus Seabury, Roosevelt, and Tammany would tiptoe their respective tightropes of delay all the way to Chicago.

This complicated, multifaceted situation helped Smith and his co-conspirators by denying Roosevelt a sizeable bloc of delegate votes in New York that Smith might eventually be able to steer to a compromise candidate if the circumstances were right. But it also

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<sup>105</sup> In 1932 Smith would never, however, insist that Curry get the entire New York delegation to back him.

<sup>106</sup> Seabury lunched with McAdoo, who told him that he would never cast a vote for Roosevelt. Seabury, like Smith, was in contact with Baker through publisher Roy W. Howard.

seemed clear that Tammany would prefer to vote with the winner, whoever he would prove to be, and so neither Smith nor Roosevelt could count on the machine's support. Governor Roosevelt escaped having to decide Walker's fate right away by asking him, just two days before the convention was due to begin, to respond to Seabury's damning charges. This exquisite timing enabled Walker, too, to put off any action on the grounds that he had to pack for Chicago.

While this spring primary season was unfolding, both Roosevelt and Smith were engaged in explicating and promoting their views about the issues that they saw as important. For Smith, lacking the kind of pulpit that a sitting governor had, this process was a continuation of what he had been doing during the past three years: keeping himself in the public eye. But because he was now a presidential candidate what he said was now more focused – and, perhaps, more noticed. In effect, he was laying out what he would propose to do if he were elected president. During early 1932 he continued his weekly column for the McNaught Syndicate. Although some of the issues Smith addressed were hardly of national import (some sample titles include “Rural Schools,” “Criminal Sentencing,” “The Cost of Local Government and Taxation”) others certainly were. Between mid-February and the end of June, 1932, Smith wrote about public works and the use of bond issues to support them (twice), the Federal budget (twice), reorganization (twice), foreign affairs (the Lausanne Conference), water power (twice), unemployment

(three times), prohibition (once), and general economic issues; his three columns on the national conventions all appeared in June.<sup>107</sup>

During these months Smith continued to deliver speeches on various topics (for example, the history of Greenwich Village), usually without radio coverage. But he also gave three well-spaced, high-profile radio addresses, on March 31, April 13, and May 16. In these, he discussed many of the same issues that he had dealt with in his McNaught newspaper columns. How many readers and listeners he reached through the two media is unknown, but there can be no doubt that the live radio addresses (perhaps drafted by Belle Moskowitz, like the newspaper columns, but delivered in the unique manner of Al Smith) were more effective in actually conveying the flavor of what Smith was actually trying to get across to the American listening public.

In the first of the three addresses, Smith described a plan to balance the national budget in 1933. One-third of the needed funds would come through increased taxes, another third from a 4% tax on beer, and the remainder from the sale of bonds to support an expanded public works program. Smith also endorsed the notion of a bonus for veterans of the World War. Although he emphasized the need for economy and streamlining of government, he advocated increasing expenditures in certain areas – even beyond the level he had included in his plan if necessary. There was, Smith said, no need to follow a “pay-as-you-go” approach when the tax burden was already so heavy. He also criticized

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<sup>107</sup> In his comments on the desirability of a balanced budget (January 31, 1932) he wrote: “A balanced budget which leaves 7,000,000 men unemployed is not a balanced budget at all. It makes bookkeeping more important than humanity.”

the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), Hoover's newly established device for providing loans in key sectors of the economy, as in adequate and ineffective.

Of Smith's three major radio addresses during the first part of 1932, the most important – certainly, the most newsworthy – was his banquet speech to hundreds of key Democrats at the party's annual Jefferson Day dinner.<sup>108</sup> This event was held at the Willard Hotel in Washington, D.C, on the evening of April 13 and was carried by a national radio network. In the principal part of his address, Smith focused his attention on the topic of international debts – specifically, the reparations due the Allies from Germany after the World War. A moratorium on these payments had been agreed upon in 1931, and a conference would soon be meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland, to consider the matter further in light of the worsening world economic picture. Smith proposed a plan in which the moratorium would be extended for twenty years, during which time some of the debts would be written off. (The New York Times headlined his proposal “Smith for New Deal on Debt Payments.”)

In mid-May, Smith outlined a program of Federal aid to end the depression. The principal elements included rigid economy of government, reorganization, retrenchment in relief for veterans, a balanced budget, and new taxes – perhaps including a national sales tax. Also on Smith's list of actions to take were the public works and war-debt programs that he had previously spoken about. In addition, Smith advocated a manufacturer's sales tax and decried taxing the rich. (“Soak capital and you soak labor,”

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<sup>108</sup> Not among them was Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had withdrawn his acceptance when he realized, correctly, that the meeting would be “packed the wrong way”: conservatives in the party were likely to use the meeting to lambaste him and his views.

he said.) New revenues would be needed, he admitted, but any strain they caused ought to be spread evenly throughout the economy. Throughout his career, Smith declared, he had stood by the ordinary citizen of limited means and earning power; he had come from this class and would never change his views. Although capital should naturally bear the heaviest or main tax burden, that burden should still be a fair one.

Smith went on, during this speech, to criticize Hoover's program to help the United States recover from the economic crisis. He said it was time for help, not talk. Relief of the country's massive unemployment and the distress it caused could not be forced back on the states and localities but should be a national responsibility. Smith reviewed the various proposals he had made for using bonds to increase Federal public works, highways, low-cost housing, and the purchase of state and local bonds (also for public works expenditures). Once again he assailed the approach of having the RFC lend money to those bodies. Interestingly, Smith endorsed advancing to the president greatly expanded powers to deal with the crisis the country found itself in.

President Hoover criticized Smith's remarks in this radio address, after which Smith supplemented what he had said with a statement on May 24. Smith declared that the need for employment "transcends all technicalities, all hair-splitting and all fine spun theories of financing." The business sector, he said, could not take the initiative in this crisis. Although he thought that he and Hoover agreed on some of the things that were needed, they disagreed on others. It was all right for Hoover to try out his ideas, but the

need for action was now, Smith insisted. He warned that a failure to get work underway and jobs created immediately might lead to more drastic solutions.

With these three major radio addresses, Smith was doing two, interrelated things: in order to attest that he was not a one-issue candidate who was fixated on ending prohibition, he was laying out the kind of economic program – and the kind of approach – he presumably would follow were he to succeed Hoover in the White House. Literary Digest even entitled its summary of the reaction to his proposals “Al Smith’s First Message to Congress.” Smith must have been delighted when he was successful in engaging Hoover in a dialogue, too, all the more because he had failed to accomplish this feat in 1928.

Although the elements of Smith’s wide-ranging proposals were not revolutionary, and though they perhaps would not have been sufficient in and of themselves, what was notable was Smith’s commitments to attacking unemployment vigorously, spreading relief fairly across the economic and social spectrum, taking into account the international implications of the American crisis, and utilizing the latent executive authority that Hoover had eschewed. It cannot be said how Smith’s proposed program might have worked, nor how his concept of executive authority would have evolved had he taken on the responsibility for dealing with the crisis himself. Remembering that Smith had questions about his rival’s abilities, judgment, and affection for radical solutions, it seems clear that Smith was endeavoring to depict himself as a more moderate alternative – more energetic than Hoover, to be sure, but sounder than Roosevelt.

Politics aside, there was widespread praise for Smith's willingness to confront the broadest aspects and interrelated nature of economic distress, for his frankness about what he would do, for his courage in bringing to the table topics (debt cancellation, for example) that others were avoiding, and in general for his vigorous leadership in the current situation. It showed him to have, one periodical wrote, "unexpected ability and breadth of view" on foreign policy in particular. On the other hand, although Smith's specific proposals were generally received respectfully, there was criticism of their substance and skepticism about their feasibility – assuming that they could be enacted in the first place. In addition, some critics (Roosevelt included) believed that Smith was now reflecting the perspective of Raskob and other conservatives associated with big business – "the tory element in the Democratic Party," one editorial dubbed them – who had corrupted his more progressive nature. Was he now their candidate, in opposition to the more radical Roosevelt?<sup>109</sup>

Smith himself sought to underscore the differences he had with Roosevelt, going out of his way, during his Jefferson Day remarks, to dramatize those differences. His slashing attack on Roosevelt captured the front pages in 1932 and has reverberated down the years. In a brief radio talk on April 7, Roosevelt had accused Hoover of ignoring the "little fellow" and declared that he himself had faith in the "forgotten man at the bottom of the economic pyramid." Roosevelt went on to contend that advocating expanded

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<sup>109</sup> Numerous notable Republicans commented favorably, both publicly and privately, on Smith's proposals and remarks in the three radio addresses, especially the one at the Jefferson Day dinner. It probably did not help Smith that it was a Republican member of Congress who placed his May speech in the Congressional Record – nor that a "Smith or Hoover Club" was formed in Omaha.

public works as a solution for the crisis was not only “shallow thinking” and “futile” but no more than a “stopgap” solution. The real cure for the depression, he went on, was an attack on the basic faults of the American economic system – a “bottom to top” solution. Roosevelt’s remarks created an “immense political sensation.” The New York Times called them “worrisome” and said that coming from anyone else his comments would be just so much “demagogic claptrap.” Tongue in cheek, it wondered who Roosevelt was *really* criticizing.

Al Smith knew the answer to that question. At the Jefferson Day event a week later, after presenting his own ideas on the key issues of the day (as described earlier) he turned to the remarks of an unnamed Democrat who in a radio address had made a “demagogic appeal to the working classes.” (Those sitting in the ballroom knew what was coming, as the Democratic National Committee had helpfully distributed copies of Smith’s prepared remarks in advance, and the air was charged with tension.) This was no time for class warfare, Smith went on. He stood “uncompromisingly” against such attempts to “stir up the ... rich against the poor” and vice versa. Hoarse, red-faced, and full of his old fire, Smith fairly shouted that he was ready to “take off my coat and fight to the end any candidate who persists in ... appeals to the masses of working people of this country to destroy themselves.” This dramatic statement – so typical of Smith’s political oratory throughout his career – brought sustained applause from those attending the dinner and got extended treatment in the press.

The “Angry Warrior,” as many called him, had skewered Roosevelt – rightly or wrongly, depending on the point of view of the listener. He was not the only one to think that Roosevelt was acting the demagogue, and some observers cheered Smith for having called his successor to account. The talk was “a ray of sunshine through the clouds,” wrote one prominent Republican, Bruce Barton, to publisher Roy W. Howard. But a more common opinion was that Smith was someone who had come to be obsessed with his sourness toward and infuriation with his old friend, Roosevelt, whose nomination he was now trying to block. His “bad-mannered” and “insincere” speech had simply been “a confession that he is out of touch with the plain man and has become the pliant partner of privilege,” one notable newspaper editorialized. Smith’s personal attack on Roosevelt puzzled and saddened many of those who had admired him in the past. One of them wrote that Smith’s “strangely halting, reactionary, and spiteful” criticisms of Roosevelt had actually revived his rival’s popularity. Smith had “governed New York brilliantly and he made a manly campaign in 1928,” this former admirer said, but now it was “nothing short of a major tragedy that disappointment, envy, and the necessity of earning a good salary” had led him to this point. “Still sadder,” he concluded, was Smith’s “astonishing loss of political acumen and intuition.”

Smith’s Jefferson Day speech also polarized opinions, especially within the Democratic Party. In the South and West, but elsewhere as well, Smith was increasingly being regarded as someone who was now in league with Wall Street and big business, in contrast to the more progressive Governor Roosevelt. One Southerner who had loyally supported Smith in 1928, despite their differences over his policies, now told Roosevelt

that "...it would require asbestos paper to print what I think about Smith." Another former Smith proponent, a farm leader, declared his Jefferson Day remarks "nasty" and added, "I could hardly believe that it came from the same man with whom we conferred at Albany back in 1928...." To many who had been skeptical about Smith's attitude toward Roosevelt, there could no longer be any doubt that he was throwing down a challenge to his successor. But his caustic criticism of Roosevelt even had offended many of Smith's old allies within the party; a New Englander described his talk as "the last bark of a dying dog." The last thing that Democrats needed was an escalation of hostilities between Roosevelt and Smith. As an Iowan said, "Nothing could have been worse for us than Gov [sic] Smiths [sic] speech except more of it."

Roosevelt evidently agreed that the internecine warfare between himself and Smith should be toned down. Although in private he admitted that he had been piqued by Smith's attack, his initial instinct when asked by reporters about his predecessor's Jefferson Day criticism of him, as it had been during the previous several years when Smith's private criticisms of Roosevelt had been repeated to him, was to pretend that his predecessor's disapproval simply did not exist. This was in keeping with Roosevelt's overall strategy of not antagonizing Smith. Before the talk, Roosevelt had fibbed that he would not be able to listen to Smith because his radio was working. When pressed for a comment after Smith's address, Roosevelt laughingly told reporters that a friend had called to express amusement at Smith's "terrible" attack on Oklahoma's Governor

William H. (“Alfalfa Bill”) Murray, another minor candidate in 1932, who was suspected of having impractical and radical ideas.<sup>110</sup>

Privately, Roosevelt regarded Smith’s thinly disguised public criticism of him as an effort to damage his chances for election after he won the nomination. Four days later, in a speech in St. Paul, Minnesota, Roosevelt – also mentioning no names – responded to Smith. He was in favor of a “community” of interests, the New York governor said. “If that be treason, make the most of it.” Although he did not back down from what he had said in his radio talk, neither did he respond to Smith in kind. Roosevelt’s temperate restatement of his views and refusal to shoot back at Smith was intended to make his position clear without making a bad situation worse. (Maybe it was no coincidence that in the same speech Roosevelt tipped his hat to Smith’s role in the fight over control of water power in New York State.)<sup>111</sup>

Although Roosevelt’s two responses, one lighthearted and the other mild, were meant to defuse the increased tension between himself and Smith, they reflected the luxury he felt as the leader in the battle for the Democratic nomination. But if Roosevelt was extending the olive branch, Smith was not accepting it from him. The sections of his radio address on May 16 that referred to a demagogue who wanted to soak the rich, impose unfair tax

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<sup>110</sup> Smith hardly mentioned Roosevelt in public. The day before his Jefferson Day speech, when asked why his successor did not consult with Smith before announcing his candidacy, Smith replied: “You’ll have to ask him. He is the only one who can answer that. All I know is that he didn’t.”

<sup>111</sup> Roosevelt also inadvertently used in St. Paul several sentences dealing with the tariff that Smith had already used four days before. The mix-up occurred because Lindsay Rogers had given identical memoranda to both candidates’ advisors, to Smith’s in 1931 and to Roosevelt’s a year later. One of the latter’s advisors, evidently Raymond Moley, concluded that because Smith had never used the information, Roosevelt could do so. Unfortunately for them, Smith had used it on at the Jefferson Day event, but no one had noticed that. Other than the identical three sentences, the remainder of the separate speeches’ sections on the tariff were quite different.

burdens, and inflame class warfare were obviously Smith's own retort to Roosevelt. More important, they were a clear signal – not only to his rival but to those others opposing Roosevelt, too – that Smith would remain in the battle for the nomination to the end, whatever the outcome of the primaries and conventions. The decision would be made in Chicago.

For his part, Roosevelt refused to back away from what he had said on April 7: two days after Smith's May 16 speech, Roosevelt renewed his plea for the forgotten man. Then, at a commencement address at Atlanta's Oglethorpe University shortly thereafter, Roosevelt was even more forthcoming on his intentions. Speaking of the "superabundance of capital" and paucity of work, he advocated better "social planning" and "a wiser, more equitable distribution of the national income." Roosevelt also remarked that the best approach to the present crisis was one of "bold, persistent experimentation." This speech was viewed as an explicit, though still restrained, rebuttal to Smith and those others (inside or outside the Democratic party) who were in opposition to the governmental philosophy he was espousing. Surely Roosevelt meant to hoist his own signal: if nominated and elected, Roosevelt would take the liberal side of the argument. When it came to economic theories, proposals, and policies, the gauntlet was down – and that fight would carry on past Chicago to Washington, D.C.

Smith's comments about prohibition throughout this preconvention period also helped him to make the point that he would fight to the finish. Although the thrust of his various public remarks throughout the spring was, rightfully, how to deal with the deteriorating

national economic situation, Smith would not have been Al Smith had he not addressed himself to prohibition as well. He realized that sentiment against prohibition was rising rapidly and that he could exploit that sentiment for his own political purposes; he had been four years too early in 1928, but this was an issue he *owned*. In addition, Smith believed that modification or repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and the Volstead Act was not only a major issue in its own right but a collateral factor in solving the economic crisis. More to the point, how a candidate wanted to treat this matter was a kind of litmus test of his willingness to stand for a principle, as opposed to what Smith regarded as expediency.

Although Smith had begun his campaign in February as by far the “wetter” of the two men, Roosevelt had in a speech later that month come out for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and a state system of alcohol control.<sup>112</sup> Reaction to Roosevelt’s move, seemingly designed to undercut Smith’s effort to ride a wet wave to the nomination, was generally positive. Roosevelt surely would gain wet Democrats, it was thought, but he would lose few dry ones because it was becoming obvious that he would emphasize economic issues rather than prohibition. A few days later, on February 27, Smith tried to regain ground by announcing in a speech of his own that he would fight for a “home rule” plank even though he was personally for repeal. It is doubtful, however, that many dries thought this distinction made much difference when it came to choosing between Smith and Roosevelt.

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<sup>112</sup> Roosevelt told his aides that he would run on any plank the party would write.

Smith continued to write about prohibition through early 1932, and his several speeches repeatedly hit the points he wanted to make about the issue. Smith downplayed his view that prohibition – “a police ordinance grafted on our Constitution,” he termed it – had been a great mistake, concentrating his focus on how rectifying that mistake would bring practical benefits to an economy in great need. First, a new tax on beer would raise money for government expenditures, while eliminating the costs of trying to enforce prohibition would reduce those same expenditures. In addition, the business of producing and selling alcoholic beverages would bring an increase in economic activity in general. Returning control of alcohol to the states, Smith emphasized, was consistent with the American philosophy and form of government. It was time for a forthright decision on prohibition, Smith believed. To him, Roosevelt’s continuing silence on the issue proved that he was a trimmer, but a showdown would come when the party’s Resolutions Committee would write a platform in Chicago.

The Roosevelt and anti-Roosevelt (sometimes pro-Smith) forces were wrestling out of the public eye as well during the first part of 1932 – in this case, over the kinds of things that could make or break a candidate’s chances. These included not only what kind of platform the party would construct in Chicago and stand on for the next four years but also the role of the party’s appointed leadership, both those in ongoing positions and those who were serve only at the quadrennial convention, and the rules that would govern the actual balloting for the candidates for the two spots at the head of the Democrats’ national ticket. It was increasingly clear to those who paid attention to such things that what happened in the voting booths and what was heard on the airwaves would be only

one factor in determining who would win the Democratic nomination: backstage maneuverings would also affect the show that the party would put on in Chicago.

Coincidentally with Smith's early-February announcement, Raskob and Shouse signaled that Roosevelt's opponents would, as speculated, be counting on a combination of favorite sons and uninstructed state delegations to stop him. Although the two party officials professed their personal neutrality as to the presidential race and repeatedly stated that the National Committee should remain above the battle, there can be no doubt that they were doing their best to frustrate the ambitions of the governor of New York – as Shouse later admitted they had.<sup>113</sup> Whether Raskob and Shouse were also scheming to get Smith himself nominated is not at all clear. By March there were reports that the stop-Roosevelt faction was confident that the delegates of as many as fifteen favorite sons, along with uninstructed delegates and those pledged to Smith, would be sufficient to block Roosevelt from the necessary two-thirds majority.

(Somewhat bizarrely, at the same time Raskob and Shouse were engaged in behind-the-scenes efforts to frustrate the plans of the New York governor, they were coaxing him to help them raise funds from pro-Roosevelt states for their Victory Fund, created to help retire the debt that Raskob had run up since 1928. Roosevelt expressed his concern that to some Democrats the Victory Fund appeared to be affiliated with an effort to defeat him and suggested that any contributions he would help to raise should be earmarked for the

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<sup>113</sup> Raskob even protested that he had never spoken with Smith about his candidacy. Charles Michelson wrote that Raskob expected Hoover to defeat Roosevelt in 1932, thus eliminating him and opening the door for Smith to be renominated in 1936.

fall campaign. This proposed arrangement doubtless did not appeal to Raskob and Shouse.)

Unsympathetic observers pointed out that if the combination of favorite sons, uninstructed delegates, and Smith's own core of supporters succeeded in keeping the nomination from the New York governor, no participant in this derailing of Roosevelt's train could hope to get two-thirds of the votes himself: it would be a deadlock much like the one in 1924. These observers were overlooking the possibility that the stop-Roosevelt group (which held an unpublicized strategy session in New York City on May 24) was really aiming to secure the nomination for a suitable compromise candidate – perhaps after the third ballot, one report said. Baker and Young continued to be mentioned as the forerunners for this role, along with Ritchie (thought to be Tammany's favorite) and even Garner. Baker, who continued to be the preference of the Smith's inner circle (and possibly of Raskob and Shouse as well) did confer with those directing the anti-Roosevelt effort in Pennsylvania, but otherwise he kept clear of political matters as much as possible. He kept so clear, in fact, that by the end of March Smith's circle of advisors were worrying that the Ohioan's aloofness was impeding his chances, along with their hopes that he would emerge as the compromise.<sup>114</sup> Baker did, however, appear at the party's highly publicized Jefferson Day event in April, where he gave some well-received remarks.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Shouse, too, believed that Baker should have launched a more aggressive campaign for the nomination during late 1931. Baker's steadfast unwillingness to do undertake an open candidacy probably contributed to Smith's decision to put his own name forward in early 1932.

<sup>115</sup> It is interesting to observe that in mid-March Smith stated that the League of Nations would not be an issue in 1932. Whether this was meant to help Baker or to defuse Hearst (an inveterate enemy of the League) is not clear.

Farley and Roosevelt's other spokesmen generally maintained an upbeat and positive tone to their periodic and unfailingly optimistic statements about the status of his candidacy. If they ever mentioned Smith, it was to question his seriousness as a candidate; if they ever alluded to the effort to stop their man, it was to scoff at the idea that the wets around Smith could even hope to unite with drys elsewhere in order to block Roosevelt. The candidate himself had criticized the signal that Smith, Raskob, and Shouse had raised about uninstructed delegations – this, Roosevelt said, would only lead to the trading of votes among leaders at the convention. Mostly, though, Roosevelt let others do the talking about national politics. As the race tightened through the spring, there were hints that the Roosevelt forces were becoming concerned about whether he would actually have enough delegate votes. They suggested they might make a move to do away with the party's hallowed two-thirds rule in favor of a simple majority vote. Those who knew the South's affection for this rule read into the willingness to eliminate the rule a whiff of desperation from the Roosevelt camp. The Governor's enemies, naturally, found the prospect of losing one of their big-bore weapons an alarming thought.

The apparent tightening of the race, along with the surprising outcome in California and the similarly surprising statement by Young in mid-May that did not wish to be considered a candidate, led to talk that Garner and Texas might hold the key to the

nomination.<sup>116</sup> For his part, Garner was said to be determined to remain in the contest until Roosevelt was out of it. He also declared that he was for the repeal of prohibition, which put him into harmony with the others who were endeavoring to stop Roosevelt. Despite this, it was Baker's name, not Garner's, that kept coming up whenever there was discussion of someone to whom the Democrats might turn should those opposing Roosevelt succeed in keeping him from a two-thirds majority after one, two, or even three ballots at the convention.

Thus the Democrats' political situation, as spring turned to summer and the party prepared to convene in the Windy City, remained a swirl of uncertainties and questions, but their 1932 national convention was certain to present the best political spectacle since their debacle in 1924.<sup>117</sup> Several preliminary rounds would lead up to the last and main event, the selection of a presidential nominee, and each of these rounds would finally settle some of the outstanding questions. Would the Roosevelt forces choose to challenge the party's long-standing commitment to the two-thirds rule? Would Raskob and his friends control the convention machinery, starting with the election of the permanent chairman? Another question concerned the party's stand on prohibition: would it endorse a plank calling for repeal or something short of that? Once the actual balloting began, would the fragile coalition of anti-Roosevelt forces hold? On which side would Tammany Hall and the New York delegation over which it held sway finally alight? And

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<sup>116</sup> There were reports as early as February 1932 that Roosevelt's aides were discussing some kind of deal with Garner, with the incentive at that time being his selection as the temporary chairman of the national convention in late June.

<sup>117</sup> Something of a surprise came when the Scripps-Howard newspaper chain, previously pro-Baker, endorsed Smith instead in early June, following a meeting between Smith and Howard. This step did not portend a real shift on the chain's part to Smith: it was merely a tactical move to build up Smith until a move to Baker could be sprung on the convention, but the chain's managers also regretted its 1928 endorsement of Hoover and perhaps saw this as a way to tip their hat to Smith.

to whom would Smith and his friends steer the votes they controlled once it was clear they had stopped Roosevelt – if they had? Would Smith himself seek to be that beneficiary so he could try to avenge his loss to Hoover four years before?

Smith arrived by train in Chicago on June 21, having spent much of the previous week in New York City entertaining scores of reporters with his sunny mood and optimistic predictions about what would happen when the Democrats met. Proclaiming upon his arrival that he was indeed a candidate to be taken seriously, and enlisted for the duration, he insisted that he was not out to “block” anyone; in fact, Smith declared, he was trying to combat a stop-Smith movement! When asked whether he would support the nominee, if it were not himself, Smith dodged. He had no second choice, he stated: “I’m for myself alone.” On June 23, getting together as had been arranged two months earlier, Smith and McAdoo had a highly publicized meeting at the former’s headquarters at the Congress Hotel; they emerged and shook hands but did not disclose what they had discussed inside. Three days later, at the invitation of Bernard Baruch and with no publicity whatsoever, the two men met alone for lunch in the financier’s at the Blackstone Hotel.<sup>118</sup> Reports emanated afterwards that the two old foes (who had first gotten acquainted in New York City nearly fifteen years before and then had been on opposite sides of the Democratic Party’s great divide of the 1920s at the 1924 national convention) had buried the hatchet and agreed to act in concert at the convention.

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<sup>118</sup> According to Shouse’s later memory, it was McAdoo who had sought Smith out and who had suggested an agreement that the two antagonists reach a “mutually satisfactory understanding” before either California or the pro-Smith states abandoned their candidates for someone else. Shouse stated that the two men shook on the deal. Baruch also took credit for arranging the meeting, which may have been intended as much to enable McAdoo to alert Smith that the anti-Roosevelt coalition was doomed to failure as to discuss a strategy that he and Smith could agree upon.

Evidently, though, the two men came away from their meetings with quite different views of what they had agreed to do.<sup>119</sup>

Smith unquestionably outlined the general strategy of the anti-Roosevelt combine and asked McAdoo to bring Texas and California (who would very likely vote together) into the fold. According to Smith's daughter, Emily, her father also assured McAdoo that he would be included in any conference on a compromise candidate – not necessarily on any strategic considerations leading up to that discussion, it should be noted. McAdoo's mindset at this point was more complex. Since his attitudes would prove to be a critical factor in the outcome of the convention, they deserve some explication. It is clear that McAdoo concluded well before Chicago that Garner could not be nominated (whatever McAdoo hoped) and that switching Garner's strength to Roosevelt, at some point, made the most sense. McAdoo was pragmatic about this: he would fulfill his commitments to Garner and look for the best opportunity to make the move to Roosevelt despite his personal reservations about him. Somewhat concerned about what he had heard Roosevelt's aides were saying about him, McAdoo visited the New York governor in Albany and came away reassured. At the same time, McAdoo was hearing from well-placed friends that if he seized his opportunity to defect to Roosevelt he would be acclaimed as the savior of the party – which would be a far cry from the abuse he regularly received because of his role in the 1924 deadlock.

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<sup>119</sup> There are allusions to other meetings between Smith and McAdoo in Chicago, but none of them can be confirmed. Months after the convention, reports surfaced about what the two men had discussed, and agreed to do together, at the convention. McAdoo blamed Smith for the leaks, described him as "yellow," and said he would counter the reports. He declared to Baruch that he could not understand Smith's antipathy toward him and that he had "assumed no obligations to Smith at the 1932 convention."

Thus any assurances that McAdoo might have given to Smith in return in Chicago have to be viewed as tactical decisions he made as part of an overall commitment to seeing that Roosevelt got the nomination in as harmonious a way as possible. If it came to choosing between the party's needs and Al Smith's feelings, there could be no doubt about which McAdoo would opt for. Remembering the discussions some months later, McAdoo claimed to have declined any formal agreement to join the anti-Roosevelt combine. He did state, McAdoo later said, that he would try to consult with Smith or give notice to him before California abandoned Garner for someone else, providing the circumstances permitted. Whether this was a "pledge" or not is subject to interpretation – just as it would prove to be at the convention and later in 1932.

As the convention was working its way through its preliminary activities, the delegates were getting acquainted with one another, and private conferences like Smith and McAdoo's were taking place, Belle Moskowitz's usual publicity machine at the Congress Hotel was beginning to grind out reams of anti-Roosevelt propaganda for distribution on the convention floor and elsewhere, just as it been doing for distribution in key states through the spring.<sup>120</sup> Publicly, Smith's friends (Proskauer and Hague, Smith's floor manager at the convention, among them) continued to insist that he could win if Roosevelt were forced out of the contest. Their calculations told them, they said, that Roosevelt would top out at 570 votes, just eight shy of a majority but far from the required two-thirds of 770 votes; these insiders said they were confident that the stop-

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<sup>120</sup> On some occasions, Smith's friends appear to have been acting in concert with Republicans.

Roosevelt bloc would hold.<sup>121</sup> Rumors continued to circulate that Ritchie would be the first option if Roosevelt's candidacy should stall; Baker, however, remained the odds-on favorite to be the ultimate beneficiary if there was a deadlock.

But the main news that day was the decision of the Roosevelt camp that it would seek to overturn the two-thirds rule. There had been rumors as early as May they might propose to do so, but still the news came as a surprise. Observers interpreted their decision as a sign the Roosevelt forces felt weak enough to need the change, lest Roosevelt otherwise fall short of the nomination on the first few ballots and risk the disintegration of his strength, but, paradoxically, strong to win the floor vote to permit the change to majority vote. This news produced angry reactions. Smith in particular spoke out forcefully on the topic, pointing out that the rule was a tradition all members of the party should uphold; even he had refused to fight it in 1928, when his own nomination might be at stake. If the nomination was not awarded by a two-thirds majority, he had said at the time (Smith now related), he did not want it. Changing the rule at the convention, especially when delegates had been elected on the assumption that it would remain in force, was literally changing rules in the middle of the contest. Even McAdoo was against the change, Smith contended.<sup>122</sup> For Smith, this was a matter of principle, and he promised to lead the fight against the change on the convention floor. Asked if he might quit the convention if the rule were changed, Smith replied: "I never quit."

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<sup>121</sup> Observers noted that on the maps in Smith's headquarters the states for Roosevelt were colored in red, which some interpreted as a comment on the alleged political radicalism of those states. There is no record of the color of Smith's states.

<sup>122</sup> If so, it was a change from McAdoo's earlier position: as late as March 1927, McAdoo had expressed his support for changing the two-thirds rule, which would put him on Roosevelt's side of this particular matter.

Informal polls of the delegates revealed there might be a very slender majority in favor of altering the rule, which meant that the change if approved would only inflame feelings.<sup>123</sup> Roosevelt's chief agent on the scene in Chicago, Farley, quickly realized the futility of seeking a vote to discard the two-thirds rule – and the damage that even bringing the matter up had done by surrendering the high roads of principle and tradition to Smith and the others opposed to the change. The Roosevelt forces now backtracked, and it was apparent that this initial round had gone to the Governor's opponents. But the incident, harmful as it had been to Roosevelt's standing, had been merely the first skirmish in the Democratic donnybrook of 1932. The next round would determine whether Shouse or Thomas J. Walsh, the preference of the Roosevelt camp, would serve as the permanent chairman of the convention. Preparations for this phase of the contest had been underway for months, and now the fight itself was at hand.

Early in the spring, Raskob had proposed that the Democratic Party's Arrangements Committee select Shouse, his right-hand man for the past three years (and certainly no friend of Roosevelt, despite his protestations of neutrality) to serve as the convention's temporary chairman, which would give him a chance to influence some of the early decisions of the gathering. Raskob believed that his own generous monetary contributions to the party over the past four years entitled him to claim this reward. Almost immediately, the Roosevelt forces made it clear that they would object to Shouse. Roosevelt regarded Shouse as an ultra-conservative, and so a risk to his own candidacy, but he took the line that Raskob's assistant was viewed as little more than a mere

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<sup>123</sup> The New York Times saw the prospective vote as 584 for and 565 against.

“propagandist” (though a good one, Roosevelt admitted) because of his and Michelson’s relentless criticism of the Hoover Administration; Roosevelt would prefer “some comparatively new name,” he said.<sup>124</sup>

When the Arrangements Committee (appointed by Raskob, it had a Roosevelt majority) met in Chicago on April 4, it worked out a compromise the Roosevelt representatives had suggested after a long and bitter debate: the committee would approve Alben W. Barkley, a Roosevelt backer, without opposition as the temporary chairman (and keynoter) and at the same time unanimously “commend” Shouse to the convention as its permanent chairman.<sup>125</sup> The awkwardness facing the Roosevelt forces was that some members of the Committee had given their commitments to Shouse early on, before his activities in striving for uninstructed delegations had become obvious; Shouse may also have lined up some of these commitments by indicating that other Roosevelt supporters had already pledged themselves to him. It was Roosevelt himself, back in New York, who had specified that the Arrangements Committee’s resolution should *commend* Shouse. His clever choice of words was a nuance that received little notice at first. Shouse himself declared that he and Barkley had been *recommended*, and most of those (politicians and reporters alike) who first reported on the incident typically used this word instead of “commend.” Thus spring 1932 saw planted the seed of a crucial semantic distinction and a bruising political showdown.

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<sup>124</sup> Eventually Roosevelt would get that new name, but his choice, Barkley, gave a rather dull speech.

<sup>125</sup> There was some uncertainty within the Arrangements Committee over whether or not it had the power to make recommendations to the convention. In a sense, this was a renewal of the disagreement that had been simmering within the National Committee during the past three years.

Within days there were rumors that the Roosevelt supporters might not honor this apparent agreement reached in Chicago, and those reading the announcement of the Committee's action began to understand the distinction being made between "commend" and "recommend." Roosevelt's backers complained that Shouse had been busy, on behalf of Raskob and Smith, stirring up opposition to their candidate in both Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Shouse's backers said that Roosevelt was trying to go back on what Raskob termed "a very definite gentleman's agreement made in the interest of harmony." By late April it was clear that the selection of a permanent chairman would likely turn into an open fight; if so, this issue would serve as one of the key tests of the candidates' strength at the upcoming national convention. Like the two-thirds rule, then, the argument over Shouse's role was, paradoxically, both a symptom of both Roosevelt's concern over the tight battle in which he was now finding himself and a sign that his strength was increasing: although he could not afford to see an enemy in the chair when the convention met, he might now have the delegates to renege on the April agreement and dump Shouse.

On June 5, the day after Shouse made it known that he would deliver his own keynote at the convention, Farley announced that Roosevelt would oppose his election as permanent chairman. The action of the Arrangements Committee in April, Farley stated, had been based on an implied promise that Shouse would remain neutral in the battles for delegates; instead, he had actively worked against Roosevelt. Thus Shouse had obtained the appointment through treachery, Farley asserted; the use of the word "commend" was not at all a pledge to him, merely a non-binding gesture. Shouse and his friends,

understandably, saw things in a different light. It was Roosevelt who was treacherous, they said: the Governor had not only personally agreed to the compromise, he had dictated the resolution that the Committee had approved. The dispute would give new ammunition to those who described Roosevelt as unreliable and perhaps even a bit shifty when it came to agreements.

Smith, who was conferring with his strategists a few days after this public brouhaha between Farley and Shouse, declared that he would back Shouse to the hilt.<sup>126</sup> Like the disagreement over the two-thirds rule, Smith said, the issue was really the “principle of keeping your word.” Whether Smith’s backing would ultimately hurt or help Shouse in any showdown vote at the convention seemed like an open question, but many people wondered if the controversy – whether Shouse (and Smith) ultimately prevailed or not – would provide Smith with an opening to criticize Roosevelt as someone who acted in bad faith and could not be relied upon.<sup>127</sup> They wondered if this might be the opportunity, with both the delegates and a national radio audience listening, that Smith might seize upon in order to review his overall dissatisfaction with his successor as governor and to explain why he no longer felt any obligation to Roosevelt. When Smith later announced that he would argue for Shouse in front of the convention, the stage seemed set, finally, for an open rupture between him and Roosevelt.

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<sup>126</sup> One account states that Joe Guffey had an informer who attended the meeting at which Smith and his colleagues decided to fight for Shouse. But Louis Howe (the beneficiary of Guffey’s intelligence) could have read that in the newspapers too, although Howe hardly needed to guess what the anti-Roosevelt forces would do anyhow.

<sup>127</sup> Making a passionate plea on Shouse’s behalf before the New York delegation, Smith asserted that Roosevelt had been a party to the deal made when the Arrangements Committee met on April 4. The delegation subsequently voted 65 to 29 to support Shouse.

The Shouse affair was, naturally, the talk of the convention as delegates began to gather in Chicago. For a time the brief but sharp skirmish over the two-thirds rule took precedence, but once this matter was settled the focus returned to the fight over Shouse's role. Or was the rule change question really settled? There were reports that some of Roosevelt's friends might revive the fight to dispose of the two-thirds rule, perhaps through a revision that would enable the convention to choose a nominee by a simple majority vote after a certain number – perhaps six – ballots.<sup>128</sup> Roosevelt's managers used their influence to squelch this idea, and when pro-Roosevelt delegations in two states (Louisiana and Minnesota) were seated rather than their rival delegations, Shouse's defeat seemed assured – so much so, in fact, that Smith decided not to speak on Shouse's behalf but to save his influence for another issue, later in the proceedings, where it might be needed.

The convention voted 626 to 528 for Walsh. Although the pro-Roosevelt and the block-Roosevelt forces did not divide cleanly on the Shouse issue, these two vote totals were a fair measure of the relative strengths of each camp – and of the leverage the latter might have to keep the New York governor from gaining the magical two-thirds of the total: 770 votes. The question now became whether Roosevelt's opponents would be able to hold the line when the balloting began, especially since it was becoming every more obvious that many of the delegates – whatever their presidential preferences – dreaded a long and bitter battle for the 1932 nomination.

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<sup>128</sup> Alternatively, the Roosevelt forces were thought to be considered having the convention select the nominees before approving the platform.

Looking at the convention's sharp division from a different perspective, it was a reminder that the party's tension between its Southern and Western wing and its Eastern wing had not dissipated. The events of 1928, when Smith was so easily nominated, had been an anomaly: in fact, the mutual lack of understanding and the resulting hostility within the party had lain dormant, ready for revival in 1932. The latent tension had already shown itself in who responded positively to the competing appeals of Roosevelt and Smith. The former had deemed it politic, two years or more before the convention, to cultivate and then reap the smouldering discontent among Southern and Western Democrats. As Smith began to beckon to his own latent support in the Eastern urban and ethnic areas where he was still regarded as a hero, Roosevelt's harvests elsewhere flourished. By the time the convention began, the deep and ancient fault lines in the party were fully exposed. But was the hunger for harmony – and victory – strong enough to keep them from fracturing again in 1932? That is what this national convention would determine.

One more round remained before the climactic battle that would determine the two nominees: what the Democratic Party would say about prohibition in its platform. The Resolutions Committee had had little difficulty with the draft platform, except for the proposed plank on prohibition. (Planks endorsing Smith's proposals for cancellation of war debts and a bond issue for economic relief were defeated in favor of those more in keeping with Roosevelt's thinking.) The problem with the prohibition plank was not whether the party should call for changes – hardly anyone argued against that any more – but whether the convention should pledge the party to resubmission of the issue to the states. Roosevelt's proponents were for leaving the matter to the states, whereas Raskob,

Shouse, Smith, and hundreds of others demanded that the party commit itself at the convention to repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment and to modification of the Volstead Act. Smith, a member of the Resolutions Committee, argued strenuously for a definite statement on prohibition. Roosevelt's majority among the delegates was obvious when the divided committee narrowly chose the first course, and Smith gave notice that he would present his minority position to the convention.

Before the Resolutions Committee came to the convention floor with its report, however, Roosevelt relented and the minority plank was substituted for the majority one by a vote of 37 delegations to 17 delegations. He and his advisors realized that sentiment among the delegates was more strongly against prohibition than they had realized, in keeping with the sea change in the country's attitudes toward it since the Committee had been appointed earlier in the year. (Even Barkley, a sponsor of the Eighteenth Amendment, now favored a new amendment allowing state control.) Smith was among those speaking to the convention on behalf of the majority plank for repeal, to which the party would be pledged. The convention gave him an tumultuous welcome that must have warmed his heart: the delegates and the galleries applauded him for fully ten minutes, and demonstrations paraded on the floor as if he had been placed in nomination. But a national radio audience was waiting, too, and so the convention had to move on. In his remarks, Smith again proudly pointed out that he had been four years ahead of his time in 1928 and warned against the nomination of anyone would prove to be a "dodger" on prohibition.

In the end, Farley and his allies among the Southern drys recognized the political realities they faced. Roosevelt's manager released the delegates pledged to the New York governor so they could vote as they wished in the prohibition plank; this would avoid his alienating wets in the states that Roosevelt might need in the presidential balloting ahead. Farley, knowing that the party's position on prohibition mattered little to Roosevelt, also realized that removing this contentious issue would leave the wet delegates in attendance without a good reason for preferring Smith, Ritchie, or another wet as a presidential nominee – and would leave the anti-Roosevelt conspirators without any issue at all. Farley's action opened the floodgates, and the ensuing vote was an overwhelming victory (934¾ to 213¾) for a plank committing the party to repeal.

But the anti-Roosevelt and wet forces seemed elated by the vote: not only had the party now gone on record for repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, which many of them saw as the major issue facing the country in 1932, but they had put the vacillating Roosevelt in a bind, trapped between his party's official position and his many dry supporters. Moreover, the wide margin of victory on the prohibition plank seemed to them a sign that Roosevelt might be weaker than anyone expected when the presidential balloting began. The convention's biggest cheer, again, was for Smith, who must have been cheered even more by the resolution of this key issue in his favor. Standing there, he may have wondered whether the delegates would cheer so lustily for him if he were their nominee as he had been in 1928. Smith may have wondered, too, while drinking in their acclaim, if enough of them might in fact vote to make him their 1932 nominee before the week was out. Did those cheers rekindle in Al Smith the deep desire to see his own name at the

head of a national ticket one more time, this time victoriously? Might this illusory wish help to stay his hand when the time came to cut a deal to secure the nomination for someone else? After all, as someone who saw Smith on the podium at that moment later wrote, “That is the way of ambition.”<sup>129</sup>

Smith could bask in affection again when his name was placed into nomination on June 30, along with those of the many other candidates. The demonstrations for him – not only on the floor but also in the galleries (doubtless packed by his friend, Mayor Cermak) – went on for more than an hour in what was to prove to be his appearance in front of a Democratic national convention.<sup>130</sup> There was only sore spot: the New York delegation was seen to cheer Ritchie more than it did Smith, just as it had when the two men had spoken earlier for the repeal plank. Curry, reaching the point of no return in his long journey to a choice between the two New Yorkers, was now being pressured to get on the Roosevelt bandwagon. It was thought that the state might give a large vote to Smith on the first round, as a compliment to the former governor, then side with Roosevelt, but this was a matter that only the balloting would settle. And there would be no delay, either, as the balloting would begin as soon as all of the candidates had enjoyed their bits of political theater. Nominating speeches and demonstrations went on for a full ten hours – an hour for each of the men nominated for president.

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<sup>129</sup> As another scholar has suggested, the overwhelming vote for repeal might also reflect the frustration of the Democratic Party that it could not do anything to affect the economic aspects of the depression that was growing steadily deeper: no resolutions or planks would enable them to address these things. But they could take a strong stand on the repeal of prohibition, making it a kind of scapegoat for the other sins that had come to light after October 1929. Striking at prohibition might at least give the Democrats – and the country – the feeling that they were actually *doing* something constructive in the current situation.

<sup>130</sup> During the demonstration for Roosevelt (a surprisingly short and unenthusiastic one), Smith was heard to say to his nephew, “Did you see all them states go by that never voted Democratic?” If so, this was a strange comment coming from a man who won so few states of any kind in 1928.

Finally, at 4:28 a.m. on the morning of July 1, the presidential balloting began. The first tally showed  $66\frac{1}{4}$  for Roosevelt (a few less than his managers had hoped – and one hundred short of the two-thirds mark) and a surprising  $20\frac{1}{4}$  for Smith, with the remainder scattered among the favorite sons and others.<sup>131</sup> New York voted for Smith over Roosevelt,  $65\frac{1}{2}$  to  $28\frac{1}{2}$ . The next ballot, begun immediately over the objections of the Smith forces, showed a slight gain of  $12\frac{1}{2}$  votes for Roosevelt and a similar loss for Smith. Now it was Roosevelt's managers who wanted a break, but their opponents smelled their dismay over such a small gain and the convention moved on. On the third ballot, Roosevelt received an additional  $4\frac{1}{2}$  votes but Smith slipped about the same number. New York held firm for Smith.<sup>132</sup> When the state's delegation was polled, as Tammany demanded, Walker bravely stood and defied his soon-to-be judge by singing out, "I vote for Alfred E. Smith." Smith, listening to this, is said to have cried out, "Good old Jimsie! Blood is thicker than water." Smith must have thought that things had developed just as he had hoped: "The balloting suits me fine," he is said to have declared after the third ballot.

In truth, Farley, who had held back a few votes here and there in order to show that his candidate was gaining on every ballot, had run out of any reserves he could glean from pro-Roosevelt favorite sons and any undecided delegates. He was acutely aware of the danger Roosevelt was in. Here, in fact, the convention had reached its own point of no

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<sup>131</sup> Garner had  $94\frac{1}{2}$ , Byrd had 25, Melvin V. Traylor had  $42\frac{1}{2}$ , Ritchie had 21, and three other favorite sons had 99 among them. Baker ended up with just  $8\frac{1}{2}$  votes.

<sup>132</sup> The strategy of the Roosevelt camp was to let Tammany Hall take its iron fist to their minority group within the delegation, which would hold them together and win them sympathy.

return: the point at which the anti-Roosevelt forces had hoped that their opponent's strength would begin to erode and they could swing enough votes to an alternative: Baker. Mississippi, considered the weakest of the pro-Roosevelt delegations, was ready to switch to Baker on the fourth ballot, followed by several others – probably including New York. But Chairman Walsh recognized McAdoo, who moved a recess, then ruled that the voice vote had approved the motion. The importance of Walsh's election as permanent chairman was now obvious. At a little past 9:00 a.m., the presidential balloting would now stop and the end-game dealing would commence.

Numerous participants in the 1932 convention left their own accounts of what happened next. Some of these are first-hand versions, some are hearsay; some were written at the time, some years afterwards. What *is* known is that rumors that the Roosevelt forces would trade the vice-presidential nomination for delegate support had, unsurprisingly, been rampant at the convention for days. Various persons claiming authority to make decisive deals discussed various arrangements with others making similar claims, and it is difficult to tease out the key negotiations that had any legitimacy. What follows is a composite that draws on all of these accounts to describe the most likely sequence of events during the final hours of the convention, which would reconvene the next evening (still July 1) after the delegates had had a chance to get some sleep.

Some evidence indicates that the Roosevelt camp had actually offered the vice-presidential spot first to Ritchie, who decided (to his later chagrin) that he would be better off remaining as a member of the stop-Roosevelt movement – and as chief executive of

Maryland rather than as vice-president of the United States. Farley then had felt out some other possibilities, including Byrd and those who were backing the Illinois delegation's second favorite son, Chicago banker Melvin V. Traylor. The Roosevelt managers also had approached Garner's managers to see if he would release his delegates – many of whom would probably quickly switch to Roosevelt, precipitating (they hoped) a general rush by other delegates to join them on the New Yorker's bandwagon.<sup>133</sup>

That offer could not be consummated yet, though, because Garner's floor manager, Sam Rayburn, wanted to see how the fourth round of balloting would go. With the situation after three ballots looking bleak to Roosevelt, who was back in Albany and so behind the pace of events in Chicago, he reportedly telephoned Baker to offer his assistance in getting Baker chosen by the convention if a compromise candidate was needed to bring matters to a harmonious close. In fact, the California and Texas delegations were about to caucus in anticipation of the fourth ballot: the wheels thus were already in motion to achieve the harmonious conclusion that Roosevelt spoke of to Baker.

Thus came about a turn of events, steeped in irony, that no novelist would have dared to invent for a political novel. McAdoo and Hearst had come to realize long before now that if Garner declined to throw in with Roosevelt should the balloting arrive at this point, the convention might in actuality nominate Baker – a candidate the extreme isolationist Hearst viewed as anathema. McAdoo had apparently not discussed strategy again with

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<sup>133</sup> Farley, a Catholic himself, was sensitive to how unhappy Smith and other Catholics would feel if Texas, which had chosen Hoover over Smith in 1928 at least in part because of the latter's Catholicism, would prove to be the deciding factor in Roosevelt's victory over Smith now. (Garner may well have shared these feelings.) Farley thus only reluctantly accepted the necessity of sealing a deal with Garner.

Smith since their luncheon, but his later conversation with two representatives of Smith's camp had been unsatisfactory, for they could not or would not say where the Smith and Ritchie delegates would alight if the balloting continued. Whether or not McAdoo then told the two men that he was abandoning the block-Roosevelt coalition and taking his own course is unclear from the record, but in any case McAdoo made up his mind that Roosevelt's very nomination now was at stake: a deadlock was imminent and Baker might well emerge the victor. He himself, McAdoo realized, was only helping Smith to obstruct the convention – and for goals that for McAdoo were suspect.<sup>134</sup> For McAdoo there would be no indecision, no dithering, no second-guessing, as there had been in 1928: McAdoo (lobbied strenuously by his old friend and colleague Daniel C. Roper) concluded now was the time to make the leap to Roosevelt, whom he considered the next best candidate after Garner anyway, whatever Smith decided.

Hearst would shortly come to the same conclusion, having been informed by Joseph P. Kennedy – who telephoned and roused the publisher out of his San Simeon bed at 5:00 a.m. – that any further delay would be fatal and would without doubt bring about Baker's nomination. Both of them having made up their minds, McAdoo and Hearst began to work to arrange the shotgun marriage of Roosevelt and Garner that would be celebrated on the fourth ballot. McAdoo delegated Roper to secure certain promises directly from Roosevelt, which he did by telephone.<sup>135</sup> Still not having heard from Smith himself, but having heard from Hearst that it would be better to take Roosevelt now despite his – to

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<sup>134</sup> The memorandum describing McAdoo's actions, written by his close associate, Brice Clagett, has the sentence about McAdoo's response to Smith's representatives crossed out, whether by his Clagett's hand or McAdoo's is unknown.

<sup>135</sup> See footnote 138.

Hearst – suspect views on international affairs, McAdoo persuaded the California delegation’s four-person steering committee to abandon Garner for Roosevelt.<sup>136</sup>

In the meantime, Garner (having consulted with Rayburn in Chicago) had come to the same conclusion as McAdoo and Hearst about what would probably happen if there was a fourth ballot; like so many other Democrats in 1932, Garner dreaded a protracted deadlock, which both his instincts and his informants told him was likely to develop unless he acted. Late in the afternoon, a few hours before the Texas and California caucuses, he concluded that he should now steer Texas to Roosevelt, accepting in return the vice-presidential nomination – the only prize his state’s delegation would regard as worth the sacrifice. Even then Garner and his agents on the scene had some difficulty convincing the Texas delegates to back Roosevelt, which they did by the narrow vote of 54 to 51.<sup>137</sup>

With the pieces of the puzzle now assembled, McAdoo was heading for the convention’s site, the Chicago Stadium located just west of the Loop, only to have his vehicle run out of fuel en route. (McAdoo, who managed to get a ride to the convention on a motorcycle, unsurprisingly blamed a pro-Smith driver for sabotaging his mission.) California, eager to preserve its key role in the making of the president in 1932, greeted McAdoo with

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<sup>136</sup> Herbert Bayard Swope claimed to have been the one who volunteered to sound out Smith, on behalf of McAdoo and others in the stop-Roosevelt group, on what to do at this juncture; Swope went to see Smith at his hotel, but he would say nothing.

<sup>137</sup> According to Shouse, the belief that Roosevelt’s health was bad led Texans to conclude that Garner might be president before long. More practically, a number of Ritchie supporters were absent when the Texas delegation caucused; had they been present and prevented the delegation’s switch to Roosevelt, he might still have fallen short on the fourth ballot and the convention might have chosen a compromise nominee.

cheers when he finally arrived, while catcalls rained down on Smith's old nemesis from Cermak's crowded galleries.<sup>138</sup>

Smith, having gotten wind of these cataclysmic developments, had been trying throughout the day to reach both McAdoo and Garner. He asked Herbert Bayard Swope to contact the former, who did not answer the telephone, and Moskowitz and Proskauer both to call the latter (who resided in a hotel in Washington, D.C.). Smith wanted to urge Garner to hold on, that Roosevelt's strength would begin to unravel on the next ballot that evening. But the manager of the Texan's hotel could not put Proskauer's calls through: Garner would listen to neither Smith nor Roosevelt – only to Hearst, the fruits of whose ripe enmity towards Smith, which the publisher had been cultivating for ten full years, must have tasted sweet now that they had been harvested as revenge.

When McAdoo began to address the convention, the entire auditorium was silent, but as the import of his words sank in the murmurs and cries and boos rose louder and louder. California had come to the convention to nominate a presidential candidate, he said, not to engage in the kind of deadlocked debacle that the party had suffered through in 1924.

The noise grew until McAdoo could not be heard, and he waited for several minutes.

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<sup>138</sup> McAdoo might have entertained the notion that he himself might be a suitable alternative nominee, despite his earlier conviction that he could never be nominated, but in any case Hearst wanted to take no chances and decided that Roosevelt was the best choice. Later, McAdoo's son-in-law stated that his father-in-law first had turned down Roosevelt's offer of the vice-presidential nomination for himself, requesting instead a veto over two cabinet positions that he wanted to ensure had no taint of Tammany: State and Treasury. Roosevelt personally confirmed the arrangement with McAdoo, the latter's grandson said, only to renege on it by appointing William Woodin to the latter post over McAdoo's objections. With or without these specific promises, though, McAdoo almost certainly would have cast his lot with Roosevelt at some point. The son-in-law also said that Hearst had wanted to remain with Garner a few more ballots in 1932 but that McAdoo persuaded him to make the move on the fourth ballot. Joseph B. Ely wrote that Smith and McAdoo met after the third ballot and shook hands on their agreement to hold the status quo for another ballot but that McAdoo broke this promise; there is no other record that such a meeting took place.

Pleas for quiet from Cermak were unavailing, and so McAdoo began to yell into the microphone. His voice rising, he announced that for the sake of party harmony Garner was releasing his backers in Texas and California from any obligation to him. Therefore, McAdoo, went on, his state would be casting its votes for Roosevelt. No doubt at this moment Smith's adversary at that heartbreaking convention eight years before was sipping from the same sweet draft of revenge that Hearst was already relishing, as the debt McAdoo thought was owed him all these years was paid in full.<sup>139</sup>

It was all over but the formality of voting. Before McAdoo had finished talking to the convention, Smith, who with friends and aides had been listening to its proceedings back at the Congress Hotel, told staffers to pack up the office for the return to New York City.<sup>140</sup>

As soon as McAdoo had left the platform at the Chicago Stadium, the fourth ballot began. Soon Roosevelt had a comfortable two-thirds majority and his victory. No one in Smith's dwindling group of loyalists moved to make the nomination unanimous, and

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<sup>139</sup> According to Claude Bowers, McAdoo had advised using someone other than himself to make known the imminent switch to Roosevelt. Although making Roosevelt the nominee might be the "something big" McAdoo had once told Baruch he would like to accomplish before he died, McAdoo realized that his being the person to announce the deal would antagonize many other Democrats and threaten harmony during the campaign itself. In any case, McAdoo's dramatic appearance before the convention naturally captured most of the attention, but it was Garner's decision to surrender Texas that had really made the difference. McAdoo's reluctance was well-placed: Raskob was outraged that McAdoo, "the prize religious bigot," was the person who announced the switch to Roosevelt, and it is likely that Smith was angered as well although there is no evidence to confirm this. So were other Democrats, all across the nation. Afterwards, as the next chapter shows, Garner tried hard to assure Northeastern Democrats that he himself had supported Smith in 1928.

<sup>140</sup> Had Smith and McAdoo ever been able to reach an agreement to back Garner, they might have carried the convention, but Smith may never have divulged to McAdoo that the Texan was the man he personally preferred. The Roosevelt side had also made overtures to Cermak about having Illinois abandon its favorite son on the fourth ballot, but California's switch left them taking a seat further to the rear on the Roosevelt bandwagon.

Smith refused to go to the convention and release his delegates.<sup>141</sup> He just sat stubbornly in his chair at the hotel and repeated over and over “I won’t do it.” Thus the final tally showed Roosevelt with 945 votes and Smith with 190½ die-hard votes. These included 63 from New York: in the end, Curry had stuck with him after all, though far from willingly, it appears.<sup>142</sup> Garner soon received his reward, if the vice-presidential nomination could be called that, and the convention had evidently wound up its official business by pairing an Eastern progressive with a Southwestern conservative. Back in Albany, Roosevelt confirmed the reports that he would be flying from there to Chicago in order to accept the nomination and to address the gathering personally; he made a point of saying that his trip was motivated in part as a way of healing the wounds that had been opened by the fight for the nomination. He added that he hoped to see Smith soon.

When reporters talked to Smith at the Congress Hotel, he was noncommittal about whether or not he would support the new nominee. How the meeting of the two men in Chicago might have gone no one can say, because Smith ultimately decided to leave the city before Roosevelt arrived.<sup>143</sup> The next morning, he had a late breakfast in his rooms and took an automobile drive with friends. Then, an hour before his 12:30 p.m. train, Smith left the hotel by a side door without speaking again to reporters. Already, crowds

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<sup>141</sup> According to Massachusetts Senator David I. Walsh, Roosevelt called him before leaving Albany and asked him to persuade Smith to endorse him; though Walsh tried, he said, Smith refused.

<sup>142</sup> Approximately 20 other votes were scattered. When Farley approached Curry and McCooey to invite them to swing New York to Roosevelt on the 4th ballot, the two bosses evidently offered a deal to Roosevelt in which they would switch their votes to him if the Governor would acquit Walker, but the deal was not made and so they refused his entreaties. Walker himself seems to have urged the Tammany leader to join the Roosevelt surge after the third ballot so as to curry favor with him. Even in those states that stuck with Smith on the final ballot (Connecticut, for instance), there was considerable pro-Roosevelt support that was prevented by unit rules or other factors from abandoning Smith.

<sup>143</sup> Smith was not the only one to head for home early: a number of the delegates from Massachusetts (who, presumably, had no personal reasons for disliking Roosevelt) were also disappointed or bitter enough to leave before Roosevelt’s arrival.

were gathering at the Congress Hotel's front entrance in preparation for Roosevelt's later arrival there. Years afterwards, Farley described seeing Smith making his way from the hotel to LaSalle Station, walking by himself. He tried to catch up with his friend and erstwhile political adversary, but Smith turned the corner and was gone from sight. "I will say this for Al," Farley noted, "he walked with his shoulders back and his head erect, although he walked alone."

Smith, sequestered in a private drawing room, was aboard the afternoon 20th Century Limited headed back to New York City along with a few personal friends and the leaders of New York's delegation while Roosevelt was aboard an American Airways Ford Tri-Motor en route to Chicago.<sup>144</sup> Smith's friends expressed doubt that he would bolt the party in November as he had bolted out of Chicago, but they did suggest that Smith might take a trip abroad and stay there through the campaign. Back in Chicago, the transfer of power within the party went smoothly, as Roosevelt graciously thanked Raskob, Shouse, and Michelson for their years of service and turned his face toward the White House. The new nominee said he was sorry not to have seen Smith. Raskob said that the party still owed him \$120,000.

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<sup>144</sup> Claude Bowers imagines a scene in which Smith, had he not listened to irreconcilable friends, would have "greet[ed] the victor, would have ridden with him to the convention, have gone to the platform with him arm in arm, and have moved to make the nomination by acclamation. An emotional reaction would have swept over the convention and Smith would have gone forth better loved than ever before." This rapturous description fails to take into account Smith's own deep disillusionment and disappointment. According to another source, one of Smith's associates, unnamed but possibly Herbert Bayard Swope, did have Smith almost persuaded to escort Roosevelt to the rostrum at the Chicago Stadium and to introduce him as the party's 1932 nominee, but Smith's wife Katie was dead set against his doing so and he listened to her advice instead. Roosevelt at least did not add to Smith's pain by posing with McAdoo after giving his acceptance speech.

After Al Smith's final encounter with the press corps in Chicago, one reporter had described his face as being filled with "bitter sadness." A friend who had been with him in his headquarters concurred, a quarter of a century later, when he wrote: "A knife had been plunged into an old wound, and it hurt. . . . He was to become in a short time an embittered old man, always remembering, never forgiving."

How could it be otherwise? His political strategy lay exposed as a failure and his last chance for the presidential nomination had turned into an embarrassing fiasco: his ambivalent candidacy never acquired the credibility to make him a plausible alternative to Roosevelt; his recalcitrance had alarmed delegates who suspected he might prefer shattering the party to submitting to Roosevelt; his flabby political skills made him incapable of getting and keeping the anti-Roosevelt bloc together; his suspected ambition for the 1932 nomination made his co-conspirators wary of him; and, at the crucial point – the pause between ballots three and four, Smith missed his one and only opportunity to start a rush to Baker by throwing his delegate strength to the Ohioan – perhaps out of a lingering hope that he himself might triumph in his last hurrah as a presidential candidate. He had hesitated at the crucial moment, others had not, and so he had lost.<sup>145</sup>

As a result of all these machinations, Smith's archrival, his protégé-turned-apostate, had – just barely, to be sure – wrested the nomination away from the rickety coalition that Smith and his circle had put together, a coalition that Smith had somewhat naively

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<sup>145</sup> There was implied criticism of Smith's lack of leadership at the convention on the part of those who had formed part of the stop-Roosevelt movement. Even Raskob voiced these feelings when he expressed regret that "we did not have a general in charge of our forces, and thus had someone in command to make a quick decision..." H.L. Mencken, having seen what he regarded as Smith's political ineptitude in Chicago, sniffed that he had become a mere golf player.

believed could, just by existing, block Roosevelt and force the nomination of an acceptable alternative. To make matters even worse, it was common knowledge that he had been undone by Hearst and McAdoo, his two bitterest enemies – men whom he had bested years ago, who had come out of the shadows to haunt him now, the latter committing the unforgivable (to Smith) sin of double-crossing him. Smith must have felt, on that final day in Chicago, that his career in national politics had indeed come to a sad and bitter end.

It is difficult to see that things could have turned out much differently. California was obviously the weakest link in the chain of stop-Roosevelt fortresses, and how could Smith have thought that Hearst and McAdoo, of all people, would fall on their swords to bring about an outcome that was less important to them than it was to him? Smith came to believe that the perfidious McAdoo had made and broken an ironclad promise to consult before doing anything during the balloting, perhaps because he had his own ambitions – for a cabinet post, for the vice-presidential nomination, or even for the top spot on the ticket if Roosevelt still failed to win the nomination despite Garner's additions and Smith, too, fell by the wayside. The other fortresses in the chain were not much stronger, and the more Smith served as spokesman for the stop-Roosevelt forces the more the contest for the nomination took on the appearance of a personal quarrel between a rising political star and his disgruntled mentor.

But Smith and the members of the loose stop-Roosevelt coalition had a more serious strategic problem than that. They were trying to beat a somebody with nobody, united

only in their opposition. Roosevelt was already well on his way to capturing popular attention and approval with his upbeat personality, optimistic outlook, and evolving program of steps to deal with the economic crisis. His opponents merely wanted to block him from the nomination, for reasons that seemed to many to draw upon spite, envy, and a reluctance to question the existing order. A good offense will generally defeat even a good defense, and confederations are notorious for their weakness under pressure. But what else could Smith have done? He was caught on the horns of a dilemma. If he had undertaken a more overt and more vigorous candidacy on his own behalf, he risked driving more support to Roosevelt; conversely, had Smith played his cards closer to the vest or tried to build up someone else instead of himself, Roosevelt probably would have sewn up the nomination long before Chicago. Smith's only hope was that the fragile anti-Roosevelt coalition would hold together there, and that hope was based more on his own selfish goals than on political reality.

Nor had Smith run a very good campaign of his own for the nomination in 1932, if that was indeed his intention. To call it amateurish is charitable. Having given mixed signals about his intentions, he then started late, spent little money, refused to campaign personally, and failed to cultivate and use the kind of able local organizers and advocates a successful nominee must have. (Instead, he seemed to settle for whoever would step forward on his behalf.) At bottom, he evidently agreed to stick his toe in the race only in order to avoid letting down his friends and to stop Roosevelt, not out of any conviction that he should and could win the nomination for himself. Although Al Smith would gladly have accepted the 1932 nomination as a gift, he did not have what would later be

called the “fire in the belly” to go after it. Ambivalent from the outset, he doomed himself to failure.<sup>146</sup>

All this is hardly surprising, given the fund of knowledge and experience and knowledge Smith had banked from his three previous attempts to win the Democratic Party’s nomination, one of them victorious. In all three of these presidential years he had had the luxury of cashing in on some favorable circumstances – the compliment of the Tammany machine in 1920, which wanted to give its governor some national visibility; the support from New Yorkers and like-minded Democrats who were determined to stop McAdoo in 1924 for reasons that went far beyond mere politics; and the scarcely concealed desire within the Democratic Party to nominate and dispose of Smith and his candidacy once and for all in 1928. In reality, in 1932 Al Smith was almost entirely inexperienced in and ignorant of the kind of hard-nosed politicking it would take to win a national-level nomination against a formidable foe: a campaign carried out, as one scholar has described it, “by a series of guerrilla battles, by tortuous, often undercover manipulating” and through “the mastery of detail.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> In his message to the Connecticut mayors, Smith stated that he did not see the need for a pre-convention campaign in 1931 and 1932 because the leaders of the Democratic Party already knew him. Smith’s basic fatalism surely must have contributed to his attitude, along with his belief that he was owed another chance at the presidency. Smith reported to the U.S. Senate committee monitoring campaign expenses that his campaign consisted of a two-week trip to Chicago; he had spent \$8,999.32 for it and had contributions of \$9,000. The Roosevelt camp had been telling people for many months about the lavish spending of the Smith forces; how true this was cannot be said, since campaign finance disclosures in those days were minimally successful.

<sup>147</sup> In fairness, it should be said that Roosevelt in 1932 set a new standard with his effective pre-convention campaign, on a national scale, that was the precursor of the even more organized ones that would follow in future years.

In 1932, therefore, Smith was in a unfamiliar position. Now the Democrats really did have a chance to win, and the stakes thus were higher than in these three earlier presidential campaign years. Moreover, whereas Smith had been fortunate in 1928 that there had been no viable alternative candidate *within* the party, in 1932 he was unfortunate in that he was contesting the nomination with a true master, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and his skillful managers and advisors. Smith was up against professionals this time, and they were able to attract to Roosevelt a broad swath of the party by offering real hope in desperate times, by exploiting their candidate's advantages over Smith, and by exposing the hollowness of Smith's candidacy. The key to their victory was their ability to draw in many of those Democrats who had resignedly given the nomination to Smith in 1928 chiefly in order to dispose of him. It was Smith who had not lived up to the implicit bargain by seeking the nomination again in 1932, and at Chicago he paid the price.

So it was that Al Smith was, finally and resoundingly, repudiated by his party. His reputation for political acumen was in shreds and his personal political future was bleak. An also-ran for the second time in four years, was he fated to become even more of a political outsider than he had been since his loss in 1928?

## SOURCES

The biographies of Smith, accounts of the 1928 presidential election, and certain other published items listed for the previous chapter are generally relevant to this chapter as well.

### Interpreting the 1928 Outcome

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### **Smith in Transition**

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