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Theodore Roosevelt, Hiram Johnson, and the Vice-presidential Nomination of 1912

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THE SELECTION of a candidate for the vice-presidency is almost always made to increase the chances of carrying a doubtful state or region. In order to "balance the ticket" a nominee is often selected to placate a defeated or disgruntled faction of the party. The nomination usually is a consolation prize offered to assure the active support of a certain element in the party that is lukewarm toward the presidential candidate. The selection, too, is often a hurried afterthought when the members of the convention are tired and ready to leave for home. Generally this has resulted in the nomination of a colorless mediocre person who was never considered worthy of the highest executive office.

California progressives in the months before the Republican convention of 1912 were not willing to allow the forthcoming nomination of the vice-president to be such a hurried afterthought. They organized an extensive campaign to have Hiram Johnson nominated as the running mate of Theodore Roosevelt whom they expected to head the ticket. The vigorous governor and the dynamic ex-president were already close friends, and it was felt that a slate which presented this combination would aid the progressive cause in California and throughout the nation.

The correspondence of Theodore Roosevelt and Hiram Johnson from the fall of 1910 through 1912 reveals a striking similarity in personal characteristics. Both men were stubbornly certain of their own righteousness and the purity of their cause. They were self-centered and thought of themselves as always right, while those who opposed them were considered insincere or dishonest, or worse. They complained bitterly of the constant misrepresentation and vilification by their opponents. However, both continually misrepresented the motives of the opposition and both were adept in the use of invective in private correspondence and in the public forum.

Three significant factors had contributed to the Roosevelt and Johnson friendship: the campaign of 1910, Roosevelt's visit to California in March, 1911, and the decision of the California progressives that October to enter national politics.

In 1910 California political reformers, who had recently banded

together to form the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, induced Hiram Johnson, a successful San Francisco lawyer, to run as their candidate for governor. In the most strenuous primary campaign in the state's history he discussed few specific issues, but everywhere promised to "kick the Southern Pacific Railroad out of the Republican Party and out of the state government."

During the general election campaign Colonel Roosevelt sent a letter to his son Theodore, Jr., who was living in San Francisco. If the Johnson forces wished, they could make the letter public. It was printed in the progressive press and a million reprints were distributed throughout California. In typical Rooseveltian style it asked all men who put the "principles of American government above partisanship" to support Johnson for governor. His victory would be the "most effective possible blow against the domination of special interests in politics, and his defeat would be hailed with joy by every man who believes in perpetuating in the country the rule of . . . crooked politics and crooked finance. . . ."

The short, stocky, square-jawed Johnson proved to be a campaigner of extraordinary effectiveness. His marked oratorical abilities helped draw huge crowds. Lacking the qualities of constructive statesmanship and the infectious charm of a Roosevelt, Johnson relied principally on emotional appeal. Pounding his clenched fist into his palm, with every posture and every gesture one of intensity, he was at his best when he was on the attack. His earnestness and his vicious denunciation of what he believed wrong and unjust won him widespread support.

On November 18, 1910, after his victory, Johnson wrote Roosevelt a long letter of heartfelt appreciation declaring "nothing was more effective in the campaign" than the Colonel's communication of support. It had helped defeat on the state level an organized conspiracy of malice and falsehood. Now Johnson saw a similar conspiracy on a national scale against Roosevelt and the fight for righteousness in government:

We are about to see the supreme test in this country—whether organized infamy may poison a whole nation against its foremost citizen . . . In this supreme struggle . . . I want to play my small part with the loyalty and affection that I have always had for him who represents what is best in our people and in their government. If you continue the good fight, I shall ever be at your command.²

Roosevelt's response that he was "inexpressibly touched" was more

¹ San Francisco *Bulletin*, October 26, 1910. Actually Theodore A. Bell, Johnson's Democratic opponent, also stood for the elimination of the Southern Pacific machine from California politics and ran on a very similar reform program.

² Johnson to Roosevelt, Nov. 18, 1910, Roosevelt MSS, Library of Congress.

than a mere formality. He showed the letter to Mrs. Roosevelt and sent a copy of it back across the continent to his son who lived a few blocks from Johnson. Almost two years later Roosevelt praised the letter before the Progressive Convention of August, 1912.⁸

Before Roosevelt's letter arrived Johnson left for the East. There he discussed with the Colonel and others a reform program for California. Aided by these talks and a number of books recommended by Roosevelt, the governor-elect had a much better understanding of the significance and purpose of the progressive movement.⁴ He evidently favorably impressed the ex-president for he wrote shortly afterward: "What a trump Johnson is. It seems to me that there is Presidential timber in him."⁵

The second significant factor which contributed to the Roosevelt and Johnson friendship was the former's extended trip to California in the spring of 1911. Roosevelt had been invited to deliver the Earl lectures for the Pacific Theological Seminary in the Greek Theater in Berkeley.⁶ He arrived on March 21 just as the state legislature was closing its highly productive eighty-five day session. Governor Johnson's comprehensive political, social, and economic reform program had been enacted into law or prepared as constitutional amendments to be submitted to the electorate in October, 1911. The Southern Pacific political machine had been forced to withdraw from state politics.

Speaking before a large audience in California, Roosevelt congratulated the progressives of the state: "I feel that California has come mighty near to realizing my governmental ideals. And I haven't come to teach . . . as much as to learn. I cannot recall any other legislature of any other state which has as good a sum of substantial legislative achievement to its credit as your legislature."⁷ Progressive Californians insisted that Roosevelt himself deserved much of the credit for the enactment of the reform program. For example, Meyer Lissner, chairman of the Republican state central committee, declared, "the wonderful governmental transformation in our beloved State was inspired and consummated through the encouragement supplied by his words and deeds."⁸ The Los Angeles *Express*, owned by Edwin T. Earl, who was sponsoring

⁸ Roosevelt to Johnson, Nov. 29, 1910, Johnson MSS, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Roosevelt to Theodore, Jr., Dec. 5, 1910, Elting E. Morison, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge, 1951-1954), VII, 177; hereafter cited as *Roosevelt Letters*. Sacramento *Bee*, Aug. 8, 1912.

⁴ George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), 135.

⁵ Roosevelt to William Kent, Feb. 28, 1911, Johnson MSS.

⁶ Roosevelt to Theodore, Jr., Aug. 23 and Dec. 5, 1910, *Roosevelt Letters*, VII, 120 and 178.

⁷ Los Angeles *Examiner*, March 23, 1911, and *California Outlook*, March 25, 1911.

⁸ *California Outlook*, April 1, 1911.

the Colonel's lectures in Berkeley, agreed. Roosevelt's preachings on righteousness and true democracy, the *Express* said, were responsible for the regeneration of California.⁹

During the ten days that he stayed with his son in San Francisco Roosevelt shared with Johnson several social and speaking engagements. Visits were exchanged in Theodore, Jr.'s, home in San Francisco and in the Governor's Mansion in Sacramento. Johnson told 12,000 jammed into the San Francisco Coliseum that it was the Colonel's "quickening of the public conscience and the virility and manhood instilled in the body politic that enabled the progressives to accomplish what they have done recently in California." At the same meeting Roosevelt told of his admiration for a "man, who by his deeds as Governor, has made good every word he uttered on the stump."¹⁰ By the time Roosevelt left the state the personal friendship, mutual admiration, and similarity of political thinking of Roosevelt and Johnson were firmly established.

The third significant factor that brought Roosevelt and Johnson together came in the fall of 1911 when the California progressives decided to enter national politics. The governor had conducted an eloquent and vigorous three weeks' campaign up and down the state on behalf of the twenty-three progressive amendments which were being submitted to popular referendum. In spite of the opposition of the largest California newspapers and of the old guard Republicans these amendments were passed by large majorities on October 10, 1911.¹¹

Johnson proudly reported the results to Roosevelt, whom he called his political father-confessor. The governor believed that the election had justified his faith in the capacity of the people to govern themselves.¹² Roosevelt replied that he most emphatically agreed in regard to popular rule. He added "although I am not a Californian I am in absolute sympathy with you and those like you."¹³ To another Californian Roosevelt wrote that the vote was an "overwhelming victory for right" and would give warrant for the keenest satisfaction to all genuine progressives.¹⁴

During the week following the passage of the amendments President William Howard Taft visited California. The California progressive reaction to Taft's trip was reported immediately to Oyster Bay. Marshall

⁹ Los Angeles *Express*, March 21, 1911.

¹⁰ San Francisco *Examiner*, March 29, 1911.

¹¹ San Francisco *Bulletin*, Oct. 11, 1911.

¹² Johnson to Roosevelt, Oct. 20, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

¹³ Roosevelt to Johnson, Oct. 27, 1911, *Roosevelt Letters*, VII, 418-422.

¹⁴ Roosevelt to Charles D. Willard, Oct. 28, 1911, *Roosevelt Letters*, VII, 426-428.

Stimson, Los Angeles progressive leader, and one of the organizers of the Lincoln-Roosevelt movement, complained on October 20, 1911, "that Taft had picked out and sent for and showed attention to everyone of the old gang who had been repudiated here."¹⁵ The same day Johnson wrote of Taft, "He gravitates naturally to what we have termed the 'higher ups' and the political crook apparently gravitates naturally to him . . . while every man who thinks or believes in political righteousness in the state was elbowed aside." In the governor's mind Taft's speeches in California confirmed their previous judgment that the present incumbent would be "an impossible candidate," who would restore control of California to those wrested from power last year.¹⁶

With their work largely accomplished in the state, and with the presidential election year approaching, California progressives became more and more interested in the national political scene. The renomination of Taft, it was feared, would endanger the progressive legislation and threaten their control of the state. In his letter of October 20 Johnson told Roosevelt that he had the highest respect for Senator Bob LaFollette, but against him the renomination of Taft would be foreordained. On the other hand, if Roosevelt himself would enter the contest for the nomination he could be successful: "I think you underrate entirely the feeling of the people toward you . . . no amount of politics and no number of politicians could withstand the people if they were aroused by extraordinary effort on your part I feel full certain."¹⁷

The same week both Marshall Stimson and Edwin Earl also urged the Colonel to run again. In their letters to Roosevelt they pointed out that the feeling on the coast was that Johnson should have second place on the ticket. Earl concluded his letter saying, "with you campaigning in the West and Mr. Johnson on the Atlantic Coast, I do not see how there could be anything but success."¹⁸

Roosevelt wrote to Johnson and Stimson immediately imploring them to do everything in their power "to prevent not merely my nomination, but any movement looking toward my nomination." To Johnson, Roosevelt was more explicit. He said that he did not share Johnson's view in regard to his popularity with the people, but instead felt that if he were nominated it would be a "grave misfortune" not only for himself but for the progressive movement.¹⁹

¹⁵ Stimson to Roosevelt, Oct. 20, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

¹⁶ Johnson to Roosevelt, Oct. 20, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

¹⁷ Johnson to Roosevelt, Oct. 20, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

¹⁸ Stimson to Roosevelt, Oct. 20, 1911, Earl to Roosevelt, Oct. 23, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

¹⁹ Roosevelt to Stimson, Oct. 27, 1911, Roosevelt to Johnson, Oct. 27, 1911, *Roosevelt Letters*, VII, 422.

However, Roosevelt's messages to the governor during the winter of 1911–1912 reveal a shifting of his position. On December 11 he wrote he had refused to assure Taft's or LaFollette's emissaries that he would not run. Roosevelt said that he

felt with Abraham Lincoln that no man had the right to ask me whether or not I would cross such a bridge until I came to it—certainly not while there was seemingly no chance of my coming to it. . . . I am not a candidate, I shall not become one, I do not think it will be necessary to accept the nomination; but if the matter of my candidacy should appear in the guise of a public duty, then however I might feel about it personally, I would not feel that I ought to shirk it. But I see no signs of it so appearing.²⁰

On January 18 Roosevelt wrote Johnson that if the nomination came as “a genuine expression of the popular will, I would feel obligated to accept without regard to what the outcome might be.” Two days later it was even more apparent that Roosevelt was indeed a candidate for the Republican nomination when he wrote: “It may be that I shall have to come out and announce bitterly contrary to my own wishes, that if nominated I will accept.”²¹

In a few days, upon the Colonel's request, Johnson left for the East to consult with him on the political strategy of the coming campaign. Johnson helped Roosevelt prepare his “A Charter of Democracy” address which was to announce his political program. Johnson no doubt encouraged him to include the approval of judicial recall, a proposal which alienated many of Roosevelt's conservative followers and perhaps cost him the Republican nomination.

Early in February, while Johnson was still in the East, Edwin Earl, owner of the two Los Angeles newspapers, the evening *Express*, and the morning *Tribune*, took the initiative in launching a campaign for Johnson for vice-president. Edward Dickson, Washington correspondent of the Earl papers, and one of the organizers of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League, received frequent telegrams and letters of instruction from Earl. Dickson was to secure the support of correspondents of the various press services for the governor. He was instructed to see Mark Sullivan, Gifford Pinchot, and Medill McCormick, three of Roosevelt's closest advisers. It was hoped that these men could be persuaded to announce for Johnson and to use their influence to secure Roosevelt's support of Johnson for the second place.²² On February 15, Earl wrote directly to

²⁰ Roosevelt to Charles D. Willard, Dec. 11, 1911, Roosevelt MSS.

²¹ Roosevelt to Johnson, Jan. 18, 1912, Roosevelt MSS.

²² Earl to Dickson, Feb. 8, 1912, Marshall Stimson to Dickson, Feb. 9, 1912, Dickson MSS, University of California at Los Angeles Library.

Roosevelt suggesting that with the Californian as a running-mate and "Hands across the Continent" as the slogan they could carry the Republican party to victory next November.²³

Feeling confident that the Colonel would favor a Roosevelt-Johnson ticket, the California progressives launched an extensive publicity campaign.²⁴ On February 16, 1912, one-half of the front page of the *Express* was devoted to pictures of Roosevelt and Johnson and a long editorial. The sketches pictured the two with hands clasped across a map of the United States. Kipling's ballad provided the caption.

For there is neither East or West,
Border nor breed nor birth
When two strong men stand face to face,
Though they come from the ends of the earth.

In its editorial, the first of many, the *Express* argued,

As Roosevelt has battled against special privilege and privilege interest in government of the republic, so has Johnson fought it, with splendor of courage and unparalleled success in the State. As Johnson kicked the Southern Pacific out of the Republican party and out of the government of the State, so will Roosevelt and Johnson kick plutocracy out of the Republican party and out of the government of the nation. [Together they would] assert the supremacy of the people over government . . . and make it an instrument for the establishment of human rights over property rights.

The next morning Earl's *Tribune* declared that Johnson's courage and capacity in making the state "free and self-governing" qualified him to work with Roosevelt for "the regeneration of the republic."²⁵

The suggestion of the Earl papers received the editorial approval of progressive Republican newspapers throughout California. The *Venice Daily Vanguard* called it a "might strong team" which would unite the East and West and win a complete victory for the common people.²⁶ The *San Bernardino Index* referred to Roosevelt as "the Moses—the hope of the Republican salvation, . . . and no better or stronger man could be named the colonel's yoke-mate than Hiram Johnson."²⁷ The *Pasadena Star* asserted that Johnson's candidacy would make certain

²³ Earl to Roosevelt, Feb. 15, 1912, Dickson MSS.

²⁴ Meyer Lissner to John Francis Neylan, Feb. 21, 1912, Lissner MSS, Borel Collection, Stanford University.

²⁵ On its editorial page the *Express* published pictures of the two men each day until after the Republican Convention. On Feb. 17 and 18 the *Tribune* published a list of twenty-four other California newspapers that favored the Roosevelt-Johnson ticket.

²⁶ *Venice Daily Vanguard*, Feb. 17, 1912. From March 5 through June 22 this paper also published pictures of its candidates for the two highest offices.

²⁷ *San Bernardino Index*, Feb. 18 and 20, 1912.

the support of the West for the Republican ticket and would appeal strongly to the progressive sentiment which the *Star* felt predominant in the rank and file of both parties.²⁸ The editor of the *Santa Ana Register* was sure this ticket of "big brains and rich red blood will sweep the country."²⁹ The *Modesto Morning Herald* felt that "Governor Johnson represents, next to Roosevelt, all that the masses of the American people desire."³⁰ Farther north, George B. Daniels of the *Oakland Enquirer* said that the combination would be an ideal ticket. The *Enquirer's* editorial proclaimed the governor "a champion of the people's cause" and a man of acknowledged executive ability "fitted by education, natural ability and popularity for the high office."³¹

The principal organizers of the Lincoln-Roosevelt League joined the progressive press in praising the proposed ticket. Chester Rowell, in his editorial in the *Fresno Republican*, stated that Johnson could rehabilitate the vice-presidency because he would be chosen by a popular demand instead of by convention dicker. Because of his close relations with Roosevelt, he would become an immediate factor in the administration.³² Edward Dickson declared that Woodrow Wilson would be the Democratic nominee and that only Roosevelt could successfully contest with him for President. Even the Colonel would have "his hands full" because of Wilson's accomplishments in New Jersey. With Johnson on the Republican ticket, Wilson's achievements could be offset by the Californian's record which made Wilson's "pale in comparison."³³

With its issues of February 24 and March 2, 1912, the *California Outlook*, weekly official organ of Johnson's supporters, joined the movement with Roosevelt's and Johnson's pictures on the cover and editorials which stressed the governor's record of administrative efficiency and political courage.

The conservative press ridiculed the Roosevelt-Johnson campaign boom. The *San Bernardino Sun* felt that there was no "more possibility of Governor Johnson being the Republican nominee for Vice-President than there is in his being made minister to Mars."³⁴ The *San Diego Union* called it a "shallow" and "transparent trick" to draw the support of California Republicans who might otherwise prefer Taft.³⁵ The *San*

²⁸ *Pasadena Star*, Feb. 17, 1912.

²⁹ Quoted in the *California Outbook*, March 2, 1912.

³⁰ *Modesto Herald*, Feb. 18, 1912.

³¹ *Oakland Enquirer*, Feb. 20, 1912. The editorial was sent directly to Roosevelt, Feb. 20, 1912, Roosevelt MSS.

³² *Fresno Republican*, Feb. 20, 1912.

³³ *Los Angeles Tribune*, Feb. 19, 1912.

³⁴ *San Bernardino Sun*, Feb. 26, 1912.

³⁵ *San Diego Union*, Feb. 21, 22, and 28, 1912.

Francisco *Evening Post* charged that Johnson had made a deal with Roosevelt to deliver California to him in return for the nomination for vice-president.³⁶

Early in March, Earl and his associates extended their campaign beyond the California borders. Earl sent telegrams to fellow progressives urging them to help persuade the Roosevelt organization in Oregon, Washington, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada to assist in placing Johnson in the second position on the Republican ticket. It was suggested that prints showing the two with hands across the continent be sent to all newspapers throughout the West.³⁷ Harley Brundige, managing editor of the *Express*, was sent to a Kansas City convention of the Associated Newspapers to work for Johnson.³⁸ From Washington, Edward Dickson reported that he had persuaded John C. O'Laughlin, chief of the Chicago *Tribune's* Washington bureau, and Mark Sullivan, a columnist in *Colliers*, to support the Californian.³⁹

In April and during the first part of May, Johnson conducted a most strenuous campaign to get California delegates elected to the Republican National Convention who would be committed to Roosevelt. On May 14 the progressives were again victorious. The Roosevelt ticket carried California with 77,000 more votes than the Taft slate, and received more votes than LaFollette and Taft combined. This victory made the progressives in the state confident of a Roosevelt victory at the convention and greatly aided the Johnson-for-vice-president movement which had slackened off in the weeks preceding the primary. In their congratulatory messages to the governor, Francis Heney, William Kent, and Edward Dickson all expressed confidence that Roosevelt would be the nominee and that Johnson could have the second place.⁴⁰

Charles D. Willard spoke for the Californian progressives. He wrote Roosevelt on May 16: "What you need to round out the ticket and to make the final campaign a success is 'a little more of the same'—a young Roosevelt." Willard reminded him that Johnson fitted the bill. He had

³⁶ San Francisco *Evening Post*, Feb. 20, 27, and 28. The Scripps papers hostile to Roosevelt, but favorable to Johnson, took note of the boom by remarking that "If Uncle Sam ever has to drive that team, he'd better order a reinforced concrete dashboard." San Francisco *News*, Feb. 22, 1912.

³⁷ Earl to Brundige, Lissner, and Stimson, March 11, 1911, Dickson MSS and Lissner MSS.

³⁸ Brundige to Dickson, March 12, 1912, Dickson MSS.

³⁹ Dickson to Earl, March 7, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁴⁰ Francis Heney, who grew up in San Francisco, had become an Arizona attorney, and the successful prosecutor of those engaged in timberland fraud in Oregon and political graft in San Francisco. William Kent, a wealthy Northern California congressman and one of the more liberal of the progressives, frequently advised Theodore Roosevelt.

“strong personality, remarkable magnetic qualities, . . . vigor and courage,” and “typifies the West as no one else could.”⁴¹

The California progressive press again urged Johnson’s nomination and in addition published favorable eastern editorials. The *Chicago Evening Post* called him “the most logical candidate.” The *Washington Times* argued that the Republicans would need all possible strength to win, and there was no stronger combination than Roosevelt and Johnson. The *New York Tribune* said it was a “safe prediction” that Johnson would be the nominee.⁴²

Johnson’s reluctance to campaign on his own behalf did not mean he did not wish the nomination. His comment “there is no candidacy on my part” and his invariable answer, when asked about his attitude toward the vice-presidency, that he “liked his present position,” led many to believe he would rather finish his work in California.⁴³ However, he made no serious effort to stop the campaign boom. In fact, when Dickson reported from Washington on the progress of the campaign, he wrote back at once, “You have been mighty good and I appreciate it thoroughly.”⁴⁴ To Gifford Pinchot’s letter favoring him for the nomination he replied on June 3 that since he felt the presidential candidate would select his running mate, it would be “useless either to expend any energy or devote any thought to the matter.” However, he would gladly accept the nomination. “I would be hypocritical if I pretended I would not like the second highest office in this count[r]y, and I should be very glad, indeed, if the result should be such that the nomination would come to me.”⁴⁵

Earl and his associates, however, did not feel it “useless to expend any energy on the matter.” Dickson continued to make use of every opportunity to champion the governor with the correspondents at the capital. Judson Welliver of the *Munsey papers*, Gilson Gardner of the *Scripps chain*, and other correspondents agreed to support the proposed ticket. When the *Philadelphia North American* opposed the ticket because

⁴¹ Willard to Roosevelt, May 16, 1912, Roosevelt MSS. Charles D. Willard and Roosevelt had engaged in an extensive correspondence during 1911. They discussed at length American history, political theory, and politics.

⁴² *Los Angeles Express*, May 17, 20, and 28, 1912; *San Francisco Bulletin*, May 17, 1912; and *San Bernardino Index*, May 17 and 20, 1912.

⁴³ Johnson to Chester Rowell, April 3, 1912, Rowell MSS, Bancroft Library, University of California.

⁴⁴ Johnson to Dickson, May 27, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁴⁵ Johnson to Pinchot, June 3, 1912, Johnson MSS. When introduced before a huge Los Angeles audience as the next vice-president of the United States, Johnson said: “Any man would be a hypocrite who would say he did not wish to fill one of the most exalted positions that the people of the United States have to bestow on their servants.” *Los Angeles Tribune*, April 30, 1912.

Johnson was needed on the Pacific coast and was "too big for the vice-presidency," Dickson and Earl took steps at once to get the influential paper to change its position.⁴⁶ A conference of progressive leaders decided to issue a special edition of the *California Outlook* for eastern distribution in Johnson's interest.⁴⁷ In the June 8 issue Rowell and Lissner reviewed the governor's role in the transformation of California from "the most reactionary to perhaps the most progressive state in the Union." Heney and contributing editor Willard's articles stressed his abilities as a forceful and convincing campaigner. Five thousand copies of this special issue were placed aboard the train to be distributed at the Chicago convention.⁴⁸

In the first days of June the confidence of the Roosevelt supporters began to wane. Although the ex-president carried by large majorities most of the states where primaries were held, it became more and more apparent that the Taft forces would dominate the convention by using national party machinery in much the same fashion the Roosevelt men had used it when they controlled in 1904 and 1908.

Johnson and his colleagues feared that with the Taft forces selecting the nominee and controlling the campaign the progressive movement would suffer a serious setback in the nation and in California in particular. Taft's nomination, they believed, would mean the overriding of the verdict of the people as expressed in the primaries and could only result in a Democratic victory in November. Domination of the Republican party machinery in California by the Taft supporters would imperil gains made by recent legislative and electoral victories, and make more difficult the election of progressive candidates to state and local offices.

Because of this situation Johnson was ready to take drastic action. He was among the first to suggest the creation of a new party. On June 3 he telegraphed Medill McCormick: "We are all on edge, determined not to submit to fraud and steam roller. If the Colonel thinks wise we will begin publicity here and continue across the continent expressing the view that the people must control, . . . and foreshadowing independent action."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Dickson to Johnson, May 22, 1912, Johnson MSS. Earl to Brundige, Lissner, and Stimson, May 25, 1912, Lissner MSS.

⁴⁷ Lissner to Dickson, May 30, 1912; Lissner to Heney, May 30, 1912, Lissner MSS.

⁴⁸ *California Outlook*, June 8 and 15, 1912.

⁴⁹ Johnson to McCormick, June 3, 1912. McCormick, who had married the daughter of Mark Hanna, had been the publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* since 1903. In the fall of 1911 he supported the LaFollette-for-President boom, but, when it appeared that Roosevelt would run, he switched his editorial and financial support to the Colonel.

In his telegram of June 9 to Lissner just before leaving for the Republican convention the Governor was more specific: "I THINK WE MAY PRESIDE AT THE HISTORIC BIRTH OF THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY."⁵⁰

Edwin Earl, though not present at the Chicago convention, played an active role in paving the way for the creation of the new party. On June 10 he wired Dickson that the National Republican Committee seemed "determined to wreck the Republican Party and throw the Presidency to a reactionary Democrat. Better therefore prepare to organize a Progressive Party."⁵¹

On June 12 Earl's Los Angeles *Tribune* featured a front page appeal to the California Republican delegates: "Resist to the uttermost every attempt on the part of a group of beaten bosses to substitute their will for the preference of the rank and file of the Republican party." If dishonesty prevails the Californians should "unite with the delegates from other States and found the PROGRESSIVE Party."⁵² This was followed by another telegram to Dickson: "Don't stand for any compromise. Roosevelt will be stronger candidate on Progressive than Republican ticket."⁵³

By June 19 it was apparent that the conservatives would retain control of the convention machinery and award practically all of some two hundred fifty contested seats to Taft men. Earl sent Dickson two telegrams to pass on to Roosevelt. The Colonel was urged to form a new party immediately since the work of the convention meant "Republican defeat this year regardless of who are candidates." "The Nation," Earl wired, "is ready and waiting for a progressive party. One or two more defeats like yesterday mean Socialism and anarchy for America, as the people will not stand for plutocratic rule."⁵⁴

Back in Chicago, Californians led the clamor for an immediate bolt of the Republican convention by the Roosevelt delegates. At two o'clock on the morning of June 20 Johnson vigorously announced their position to a meeting of Roosevelt's supporters in the Congress Hotel:

We are going to stop dilly-dallying with this robbing convention. We are going in there to fight, and we are prepared for the birth of a new Republican party. This new party, which is inevitable, will not countenance robbery, thievery and dishonesty such as we have experienced here.⁵⁵

On June 21 the governor made a final and forceful plea for the seating of two pro-Roosevelt delegates from California. Plainly angry, he

⁵⁰ Johnson to Lissner, June 9, 1912, Lissner MSS.

⁵¹ Earl to Dickson, June 10, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁵² Los Angeles *Tribune*, June 12, 1912.

⁵³ Dickson MSS.

⁵⁴ Earl to Dickson, June 19, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁵⁵ San Francisco *Examiner*, June 21, 1912.

spoke with great vehemence and intensity as he denounced what he called "the outrage being perpetrated."

I shall not sit in this convention during the nomination of a president nor consider myself bound by its acts. Not only was a fraudulent roll call foisted on us to defeat the people's will, but the law of the State of California, . . . as California Governor, I feel my duty plain—to remain no longer in the convention.

This question goes to the very root of republicanism. It is, shall the people rule? Theodore Roosevelt has demonstrated in this campaign that all the people—not a part of them—have the right to rule in this nation.⁵⁶

William Jennings Bryan, who was covering the convention for the *Earl papers*, joined in the applause and wrote in his column that Johnson was the "hero of the day" and his speech "the gem of the convention." Bryan believed that the speech had "the ring of sincerity" and "convinced the audience that he had justice on his side, but the audience was not in a position to follow its convictions."⁵⁷

The San Francisco *Argonaut*, the voice of the financial district of the city, was not impressed with Johnson's role:

How pitifully small appears this little coxcomb in his efforts to strut and pose in the turmoil of large affairs!

From start to finish he played the part of a mean-spirited, bad tempered, spoiled boy, minus manner, minus fairness, minus poise, minus any trace of manly dignity or grace.⁵⁸

On June 22, undisturbed by cries of "We want Teddy" and noises resembling the whistles of hundreds of steam rollers, the Taft forces nominated their candidate. That evening Roosevelt's supporters met in Orchestra Hall. Following the singing of religious and patriotic songs and the reading of the Twenty-third Psalm, Governor Johnson opened the formal part of the meeting. He aroused the gathering to a pitch of excitement and announced:

We came to carry out . . . not the will of a rotten boss in Pennsylvania or a crooked one in New York, . . . but to carry out the mandate of the people to

⁵⁶ San Francisco *Examiner*, June 22, 1912. The Republican National Committee had seated two Taft delegates from a San Francisco congressional district. A California law required the election of convention delegates on a statewide basis, but the Republican party rules called for election by congressional districts. Although Roosevelt had carried California by a large majority, the Taft forces claimed that since they had won a majority of the votes in this San Francisco district by party rules they were entitled to two delegates. On the other hand, Roosevelt supporters claimed that because of the state law, all of the California delegates should be committed to Roosevelt. They also pointed out that the city registrar of voters had admitted that because of boundary changes it was actually impossible to tell which candidate had carried the disputed district.

⁵⁷ Los Angeles *Express*, June 22, 1912.

⁵⁸ *Argonaut*, June 22 and 29, 1912.

nominate Theodore Roosevelt. By a fraudulent vote he has been robbed of what was his. We proposed that, Mr. Roosevelt having won his fight, shall have his reward.⁵⁹

The Colonel himself next took the floor. He asked his supporters to go home and sound out the country and then return in a few weeks to make their nominations. He declared with his usual vehemence that the issue was no longer one of progressivism alone, but one of common honesty as well. "If you wish me to make the fight," he said, "I will make it, even if only one state should support me."⁶⁰

Encouraged by the enthusiasm engendered at the organizational meeting, Johnson boarded the train for California with high hopes for the new movement.⁶¹ Although the newspapers reported that many of the leading politicians who had supported Roosevelt in the primaries refused to join the new party, Johnson was still optimistic. He wired the Colonel on June 28: "Disregard the politicians, get your name on the ballot, and with a publicity bureau that is competent and full of energy and virility, the people will do the rest."⁶²

The hope of the Progressive party that they could attract liberal Democratic and independent voters was destroyed by the nomination of Woodrow Wilson. Johnson wrote friends that although he believed the New Jersey governor was "academic" and "anemic," his selection "hurt tremendously"—it was a "solar plexus blow."⁶³ On July 2, the day of Wilson's nomination, Roosevelt wrote that he felt there was little chance now of victory, but he would not abandon the fight even though he did not get a single electoral vote. "To support Taft," he said, "would be to support a thief who is backed by thieves." On the other hand, Wilson, a "visionary" without "deep convictions, was backed by as wicked a set of corruptions as ever controlled a party."⁶⁴

Johnson's answer of July 8 advised that "our progressive platform should be radical, and by this, I do not mean the radicalism of Debs and his sort, but the radicalism that has obtained in such states as California." They should sound a note "that is absent from both old parties, . . . human sympathy," and stress that "the first object of government [is] not property, but the creator of property, man."⁶⁵ Roosevelt replied "I

⁵⁹ San Francisco *Examiner*, June 23, 1912, and New York *Times*, June 23, 1912.

⁶⁰ New York *Times*, June 23, 1912, and the Los Angeles *Tribune*, June 24, 1912.

⁶¹ Johnson to George Record, July 8, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁶² Johnson to Roosevelt, June 28, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁶³ Johnson to Record, July 8, 1912; Johnson to McCormick, July 11, 1912; Johnson to J. C. O'Laughlin, July 11, 1911, Johnson MSS.

⁶⁴ Roosevelt to Johnson, July 2, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁶⁵ Johnson to Roosevelt, July 8, 1912, Johnson MSS.

agree absolutely that we must make this a straight out fight for the people." On the first day of the convention, he promised, he would make his "confession of faith."⁶⁶

While Roosevelt and Johnson concerned themselves with the larger issues and problems of the campaign, publisher Earl continued to be concerned with the vice-presidential nomination. Earl felt that the selection of William Jennings Bryan for the second place on the ticket would bring the broadest possible support to the new party. Earl was encouraged by the reports that Bryan would support the Progressive ticket if the liberals were ignored at the Democratic convention in Baltimore. Dickson was urged to see Bryan to convince him that he should join the new Progressive party and run with Roosevelt.⁶⁷ Even after Bryan had played a leading role in securing the Democratic nomination for Wilson, Earl did not lose hope. Dickson was continually instructed to see Bryan personally in order to persuade him to accept the nomination as Roosevelt's running-mate.⁶⁸ When Dickson became ill and failed to answer his urgent appeals, Earl, on July 5, hurriedly dispatched a telegram and a long letter directly to Bryan. It was suggested that if the Nebraskan were "to cut loose of the Democrats and join the Progressives" he could be "easily elected President" in 1916.⁶⁹

On July 15, having received no negative response from Bryan, Earl wrote to Roosevelt that he believed Bryan "could be gotten on the ticket if proper influence could be brought to bear on him." If, however, neither Bryan nor a satisfactory southern Democrat were available, Earl again reminded Roosevelt that Hiram Johnson was "the best man obtainable for your running-mate. With the slogan 'Hands Across the Continent' it would be a winning ticket."⁷⁰

By July 25, Earl apparently had lost hope that Bryan could in some way be persuaded to accept the nomination for second place. He wrote Johnson that they had found no strong Democrat to make the slate attractive to the South. Therefore, Earl concluded, "you are the man to go on the ticket with Roosevelt."⁷¹ Johnson sent an immediate answer. He noted "with pride and gratification" Earl's suggestion but he did not wish the vice-presidential nomination of the new party.⁷² During the days preceding the convention he was quoted in the press as favoring

⁶⁶ Roosevelt to Johnson, July 20, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁶⁷ Earl to Dickson, June 11, 25, 29, and July 1, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁶⁸ Earl to Dickson, July 7 and 22, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁶⁹ Earl to Bryan, July 5, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁷⁰ Earl to Roosevelt, July 15, 1912, Johnson MSS.

⁷¹ Earl to Johnson, July 25, 1912, Dickson MSS.

⁷² Johnson to Earl, July 26, 1912, Johnson MSS.

a southern Democrat for the honor so that the Progressives could more successfully break party and sectional lines.⁷³

Johnson remained reluctant to accept second place in the crusade until the night before the actual selection by the Progressive convention. He knew that the Progressive party faced defeat in November, and did not wish to undertake a three-month campaign outside California which might jeopardize his control at home. He was requested to assent as a moral obligation with the argument that since their leader "did not shrink from a humiliating defeat where others were demanded they should yield." To satisfy his demand, other candidates withdrew. Only after Roosevelt personally intervened by sending word "You must come along with me, Hiram" did Johnson agree to run.⁷⁴

The next day, as Roosevelt and Johnson stepped out to announce their acceptances, a banner dropped like a curtain behind them from the rafters directly over-head. This huge banner, forty feet wide and twenty feet high, carried the slogan long used by the California press:

Hands across the Continent
Roosevelt and Johnson
New York and California
For there is neither East nor West⁷⁵

In his acceptance speech Roosevelt recalled the letter which Johnson had sent him November 18, 1910. It was one of "ardent championship" in his "hour of darkness and peril" which, he said, "I shall hand on to my children, and children's children. . . . In Governor Johnson we have a man whose every word is made upon by the deeds he has done."⁷⁶

Upon the adjournment of the convention Roosevelt wired Earl:

California should have a peculiar feeling of proprietorship in the Progressive party, for no state has done more to make it possible; and nationally our purpose is to achieve substantially what under the lead of Governor Johnson is being achieved in California.⁷⁷

In the history of the United States there probably has been no more extensive campaign to secure the nomination of a man for second place on the national ticket. The five-month campaign led by Edwin Earl

⁷³ *New York Times*, Aug. 4, 1912; *Los Angeles Tribune*, Aug. 4 and 5, 1912.

⁷⁴ *Los Angeles Tribune* Aug. 6, 1912; *San Francisco Examiner*, Aug. 12, 1912; and *California Outlook*, Aug. 17, 1912; Johnson to W. F. Chandler, Aug. 21, 1912, Johnson MSS; Chester Rowell to William Allen White, Nov. 29, 1919, Rowell MSS; and interview of the author with Hiram Johnson, Jr., Nov., 1956.

⁷⁵ *California Outlook*, Aug. 17, 1912, and *Los Angeles Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1912.

⁷⁶ For various versions see *Sacramento Bee*, *Los Angeles Examiner*, *Los Angeles Tribune*, and *Chicago Examiner*, all for Aug. 8, 1912.

⁷⁷ Roosevelt to *Los Angeles Tribune*, Aug. 7, 1912, published the next day.

to secure Johnson's selection had succeeded. The California progressives had also played a paramount role in the creation of the Progressive party and in the formulation of its program. However, the hopes of the California progressives were not realized. Governor Johnson, who would have been "very glad" to have received the Republican nomination as Roosevelt's running mate, did not welcome the same position on the Progressive ticket. Because of the schism within the Republican party, the nomination of Woodrow Wilson for the presidency by the Democratic party and for other reasons, the Roosevelt-Johnson ticket was unsuccessful. Indeed it failed to aid the progressive cause either in California or in the nation at large.

During the months between fall of 1910 and the summer of 1912 Roosevelt and Johnson had formed a personal friendship with a remarkable similarity of views on the political issues of the day. In spite of political disagreements which sometimes threatened to draw them apart, they remained close confidants. Even after Johnson was elected to the United States Senate he was frequently the spokesman for Roosevelt in Congress. And Roosevelt, until his death in January, 1919, continued to be Johnson's "political father-confessor."⁷⁸

⁷⁸ For the period from March, 1917, until the Colonel's death the Roosevelt collection in the Library of Congress has more than forty letters exchanged by the two men.