

## CHAPTER LX

### THE MACHINE

THE organization of an American party consists of two distinct, but intimately connected, sets of bodies, the one permanent, the other temporary. The function of the one is to manage party business, of the other to nominate party candidates.

The first of these is a system of managing committees. In some States every election district has such a committee, whose functions cover the political work of the district. Thus in country places there is a township committee, in cities a ward committee. There is a committee for every city, for every district, and for every county. In other States it is only the larger areas, cities, counties, and Congressional or State Assembly districts that have committees. There is, of course, a committee for each State, with a general supervision of such political work as has to be done in the State as a whole. There is a National Committee for the political business of the party in the Union as a whole, and especially for the presidential contest.<sup>1</sup> The whole country is covered by this network of committees, each with a sphere of action corresponding to some constituency or local election area, so that the proper function of a city committee, for instance, is to attend to elections for city offices, of a ward committee to elections for ward offices, of a district committee to elections for district offices. Of course the city committee, while supervising the general conduct of city elections, looks to each ward organization to give special attention to the elections in its own ward; and the State committee will in State

<sup>1</sup> Within the State Committees and National Committee there is a small Executive Committee which practically does most of the work and exercises most of the power.

elections expect similar help from, and be entitled to issue directions to, all bodies acting for the minor areas — districts, counties, townships, cities, and wards — comprised in the State. The smaller local committees are in fact autonomous for their special local purposes, but subordinate in so far as they serve the larger purposes common to the whole party. The ordinary business of these committees is to raise and apply funds for election purposes and for political agitation generally, to organize meetings when necessary, to disseminate political tracts and other information, to look after the press, to attend to the admission of immigrants as citizens and their enrolment on the party lists.<sup>1</sup> At election times they have also to superintend the canvass, to procure and distribute tickets at the polls, to allot money for various election services; but they are often aided, or virtually superseded, in this work by "campaign committees" specially created for the occasion. Finally, they have to convoke at the proper times those nominating assemblies which form the other parallel but distinct half of the party organization.

These committees are permanent bodies, that is to say, they are always in existence and capable of being called into activity at short notice. They are re-appointed annually by the Primary (hereinafter described) or Convention (as the case may be) for their local area, and of course their composition may be completely changed on a re-appointment. In practice it is but little changed, the same men continuing to serve year after year, because they hold the strings in their hands, because they know most and care most about the party business. In particular, the chairman is apt to be practically a permanent official, and (if the committee be one for a populous area) a powerful and important official, who has large sums to disburse and quite an army of workers under his orders. The chairmanship of the organizing committee of the county and city of New York (these areas being the same), for instance, is a post of great responsibility and influence, in which high executive gifts find a worthy sphere for their exercise.

One function and one only is beyond the competence of

<sup>1</sup> The business of registration is, I think, in all States undertaken by the public authority for the locality, instead of being, as in England, partially left to the action of the individual citizen or of the parties.

these committees—the choice of candidates. That belongs to the other branch of the organization, the nominating assemblies.

Every election district, by which I mean every local area or constituency which chooses a person for any office or post, administrative, legislative, or judicial, has a party meeting to select the party candidate for that office. This is called Nominating. If the district is not subdivided, *i.e.* does not contain any lesser districts, its meeting is called a Primary. A primary has two duties. One is to select the candidates for its own local district offices. Thus in the country a township primary<sup>1</sup> nominates the candidates for township offices, in a city a ward primary nominates those for ward offices (if any). The other duty is to elect delegates to the nominating meetings of larger areas, such as the county or congressional district in which the township is situate, or the city to which the ward belongs. The primary is composed of all the party voters resident within the bounds of the township or ward. They are not too numerous, for in practice the majority do not attend, to meet in one room, and they are assumed to be all alike interested. But as the party voters in such a large area as a county, congressional district, or city, are too numerous to be able to meet and deliberate in one room, they usually act through representatives, and entrust the choice of candidates for office to a body called a Nominating Convention.<sup>2</sup> This body is composed of delegates from all the primaries within its limits, chosen at those primaries for the sole purpose of sitting in the convention and of there selecting the candidates.

Sometimes a convention of this kind has itself to choose delegates to proceed to a still higher convention for a larger area. The greatest of all nominating bodies, that which is called the National Convention and nominates the party can-

<sup>1</sup> I take township and ward as examples, but in parts of the country where the township is not the unit of local government (see Chapter XLVIII. *ante*), the local unit, whatever it is, must be substituted.

<sup>2</sup> Now, however, it sometimes happens that a primary is held for a whole Congressional district or city, the party voters voting at party polls (under a statute) for the persons proposed for party candidates, just as they would vote at an election. In a recent (1893) such city primary election at Louisville (Ky.), I find the primary treated by the local journals as being virtually the election.

didate for the presidency, is entirely composed of delegates from other conventions, no primary being directly represented in it. As a rule, however, there are only two sets of nominating authorities, the primary which selects candidates for its own petty offices, the convention composed of the delegates from all the primaries in the local circumscriptions of the district for which the convention acts.

A primary, of course, sends delegates to a number of different conventions, because its area, let us say the township or ward, is included in a number of different election districts, each of which has its own convention. Thus the same primary will in a city choose delegates to at least the following conventions, and probably to one or two others.<sup>1</sup> (a) To the city convention, which nominates the mayor and other city officers. (b) To the Assembly district convention, which nominates candidates for the lower house of the State legislature. (c) To the senatorial district convention, which nominates candidates for the State Senate. (d) To the congressional district convention, which nominates candidates for Congress. (e) To the State convention, which nominates candidates for the governorship and other State offices. Sometimes, however, the nominating body for an Assembly district is a primary and not a convention. In New York City the Assembly district is the unit, and each of the thirty districts has its primary.

This seems complex: but it is a reflection of the complexity of government, there being everywhere three authorities, Federal, State, and Local (this last further subdivided), covering the same ground, yet the two former quite independent of one another, and the third for many purposes distinct from the second.

The course of business is as follows:—A township or ward primary is summoned by the local party managing committee, who fix the hour and place of meeting, or if there be not such a committee, then by some permanent officer of the organization in manner prescribed by the by-laws. A primary for a larger area is usually summoned by the county committee.

<sup>1</sup> There may be also a county convention for county offices, and a judicial district convention for judgeships, but in a large city or county the county convention delegates may also be delegates to the congressional convention, perhaps also to the State assembly district and senatorial district conventions.

If candidates have to be chosen for local offices, various names are submitted and either accepted without a division or put to the vote, the person who gets most votes being declared chosen to be the party candidate. He is said to have received the party nomination. The selection of delegates to the various conventions is conducted in the same way. The local committee has usually prepared beforehand a list of names of persons to be chosen to serve as delegates, but any voter present may bring forward other names. All names, if not accepted by general consent, are then voted on. At the close of the proceedings the chairman signs the list of delegates chosen to the approaching convention or conventions, if more than one, and adjourns the meeting *sine die*.

The delegates so chosen proceed in due course to their respective conventions, which are usually held a few days after the primaries, and a somewhat longer period before the elections for offices.<sup>1</sup> The convention is summoned by the managing committee for the district it exists for, and when a sufficient number of delegates are present, some one proposes a temporary chairman, or the delegate appointed for the purpose by the committee of the district for which the convention is being held "calls the meeting to order" as temporary chairman. This person names a Committee on Credentials, which forthwith examines the credentials presented by the delegates from the primaries, and admits those whom it deems duly accredited. Then a permanent chairman is proposed and placed in the chair, and the convention is held to be "organized," *i.e.* duly constituted. The managing committee have almost always arranged beforehand who shall be proposed as candidates for the party nominations, and their nominees are usually adopted. However, any delegate may propose any person he thinks fit, being a recognized member of the party, and carry him on a vote if he can. The person adopted by a majority of delegates' votes becomes the party candidate, having "received the nomination." The convention sometimes, but not always, also amuses itself by passing resolutions expressive of its political sentiments; or if it

<sup>1</sup> In the case of elections to the Presidency and to the Governorship of a State the interval between the nominating convention and the election is much longer — in the former case about four months.

is a State convention or a National convention, it adopts a platform, touching on, rather than dealing with, the main questions of the day. It then, having fulfilled its mission, adjourns *sine die*, and the rest of the election business falls to the managing committee. It must be remembered that primaries and conventions, unlike the local party associations of England, are convoked but once, make their nominations, and vanish. They are swans which sing their one song and die.

The national convention held every fourth year before a presidential election needs a fuller description, which I shall give presently. Meantime three features of the system just outlined may be adverted to.

Every voter belonging to the party in the local area for which the primary is held, is presumably entitled to appear and vote in it. In rural districts, where everybody knows everybody else, there is no difficulty about admission, for if a Democrat came into a Republican primary, or a Republican from North Adams tried to vote in the Republican primary of Lafayetteville, he would be recognized as an intruder and expelled. But in cities where people do not know their neighbours by head-mark, it becomes necessary to have regular lists of the party voters entitled to a voice in the primary. These are made up by the local committee, which may exclude persons whom, though they call themselves Republicans (or Democrats, as the cases may be), it deems not loyal members of the party. The usual test is, Did the claimant vote the party ticket at the last important election, generally the presidential election, or that for the State governorship? If he did not, he may be excluded. Frequently, however, the local rules of the party require every one admitted to the list of party voters to be admitted by the votes of the existing members, who may reject him at their pleasure, and also exact from each member two pledges, to obey the local committee, and to support the party nominations, the breach of either pledge being punishable by expulsion. In many primaries voters supposed to be disagreeably independent are kept out either by the votes of the existing members or by the application of these strict tests. Thus it happens that three-fourths or even four-fifths of the party voters in a primary area may not be on the lists and entitled to raise their voice in the primary for the selection of candidates or dele-

gates. Another regulation, restricting nominations to those who are enrolled members of the regular organization, makes persons so kept off the list ineligible as party candidates.

Every member of a nominating meeting, be it a primary or a convention of delegates, is deemed to be bound by the vote of the majority to support the candidate whom the majority select, whether or no an express pledge to that effect has been given. And in the case of a convention a delegate is generally held to bind those whom he represents, *i.e.* the voters at the primary which sent him. Of course no compulsion is possible, but long usage and an idea of fair play have created a sentiment of honour (so-called) and party loyalty strong enough, with most people and in all but extreme cases, to secure for the party's candidate the support of the whole party organization in the district.<sup>1</sup> It is felt that the party must be kept together, and that he who has come into the nominating assembly hoping to carry his own candidate ought to obey the decision of the majority. The vote of a majority has a sacredness in America not yet reached in Europe.

As respects the freedom left to delegates to vote at their own pleasure or under the instructions of their primary, and to vote individually or as a solid body, the practice is not uniform. Sometimes they are sent up to the nominating convention without instructions, even without the obligation to "go solid." Sometimes they are expressly directed, or it is distinctly understood by them and by the primary, that they are to support the claims of a particular person to be selected as candidate, or that they are at any rate to vote altogether for one person. Occasionally they are even given a list arranged in order of preference, and told to vote for A. B., failing him for C. D., failing him for E. F., these being persons whose names have already been mentioned as probable candidates for the nomination. This, however, would only happen in the case of the greater offices, such as those of member of Congress or governor of a State. The point is in practice less important than it seems, because in most cases, whether there be any specific and avowed instruction or not, it is well settled beforehand by those who manage the choice of delegates what candidate any

<sup>1</sup> The obligation is however much less strict in the case of municipal elections, in which party considerations sometimes count for little.

set of delegates are to support, or at least whose lead they are to follow in the nominating convention.

Note further how complex is the machinery needed to enable the party to concentrate its force in support of its candidates for all these places, and how large the number of persons constituting the machinery. Three sets of offices, municipal or county, State, Federal, have to be filled; three different sets of nominating bodies are therefore needed. If we add together all the members of all the conventions included in these three sets, the number of persons needed to serve as delegates will be found to reach a high total, even if some of them serve in more than one convention. Men whose time is valuable will refuse the post of delegate, gladly leaving to others who desire it the duty of selecting candidates for offices to which they seldom themselves aspire. However, as we shall see, such men are but rarely permitted to become delegates, even when they desire the function.

"Why these tedious details?" the European reader may exclaim. "Of what consequence can they be compared to the Constitution and laws of the country?" Patience. These details have more significance and make more difference to the working of the government than many of the provisions of the Constitution itself. The mariner feels the trade winds which sweep over the surface of the Pacific and sees nothing of the coral insects which are at work beneath its waves, but it is by the labour of these insects that islands grow, and reefs are built up on which ships perish.