

“A Man of Belial”:

Roger C. Sullivan, the Progressive Democracy,
and the Senatorial Elections of 1914

by

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In January 1914, Roger Charles Sullivan, the Illinois' Democracy's most notorious machine politician and boss, announced his candidacy for his party's nomination for the United States Senate. On the face of it, this appeared to be a serious miscalculation. Just two years earlier another Chicago boss, Republican William Lorimer, had been expelled from the Senate amidst much recrimination and outrage for having won his election through bribery. This in turn played a role in the subsequent breakup of the Republicans and the creation of a state Progressive Party. Among the Democrats it was a factor in the ascendancy of the party's reform wing, culminating in the election as governor in 1912 of a leading progressive named Edward F. Dunne. Allied with Dunne was a coalition of powerful figures who were instinctively opposed to Sullivan and the style of politics he represented. These included United States Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan, Senator J. Hamilton Lewis; Chicago's Mayor Carter Harrison II, and a host of lesser reformers. Moreover, Illinois' primary law and the recent ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment made 1914 the first election year in which candidates were compelled to face the voters twice on a statewide basis, and this Sullivan had never done.

However, he met the challenge brilliantly. Ironically using a primary and election created and celebrated by progressives, he bypassed his opposition and went to the voters to emphasize his support of the regulation of business and of the administration of Woodrow Wilson. In contrast, the Democratic progressives were

name with the stain of corruption.³

On the night of 25 February 1895, the Chicago City Council enacted ordinances that extended franchise rights to the Ogden Gas Company. It was common knowledge that the business was in part owned by Sullivan, and it was assumed that it was a “dummy” concern created to force a purchase at a tidy profit to the existing gas corporations. Led by the recently created Civic Federation, public outrage followed. Anger only increased when it became known that Mayor Hopkins, four aldermen, and other influential political figures also held a financial interest.⁴

Contrary to the popular expectation, the Ogden Gas Company actually began operation. However, as expected, it was soon sold to the Municipal Gas Company, to the benefit of Sullivan and his associates. Sullivan served as Ogden’s secretary and president, but it was his share of the sale, reputedly to be over a half a million dollars, which was to be the basis of his personal fortune, a fortune which, augmented by his interest in the Sawyer Biscuit Company and other investments, would amount to over a million and a half dollars at his death.⁵

Good business proved to be bad politics. The Ogden Gas Scandal was to follow Sullivan and Hopkins forever afterwards (Hopkins wisely declined to stand for reelection). More importantly, the affair helped provide the opportunity for the rise of a rival Democratic organization under the leadership of the son and namesake of the martyred Carter Harrison. Carter Harrison II, as he was known (he was actually the fourth of that name in his family), was moderately sympathetic to reform. However, he also cultivated the support of such notorious figures as “Hinky Dink” Michael Kenna and “Bathhouse” John Coughlin, aldermen of the

3. *Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 1920, p. 3; *Mason County Democrat*, 16 September 1914, p. 1; Zink, *City Bosses*, pp. 291-93; Walter A. Townsend, *Illinois Democracy: A History of the Party and Its Representative Members Past and Present*, 2 vols. (Springfield, IL: Democratic Historical Association, 1935), I:245.

4. *Chicago Tribune*, 26 February 1895, pp. 1, 5; 27 February 1895, pp. 1, 2, 6; 28 February 1895, pp. 1, 2; 1 March 1895, pp. 6, 7; 2 March 1895, pp. pp. 1, 3; 3 March 1895, pp. 1, 5; 4 March 1895, pp. 1, 2; 5 March 1895, pp. 1, 11; 6 March 1895, p. 6; 7 March 1895, p. 6.

5. *Ibid.*, 15 April 1929, p. 3; Dunne, *Illinois*, I:274.

vice-ridden "Levee" district. In 1897, in the aftermath of the Ogden affair, Harrison II was elected to the first of his own five terms as the city's chief executive, and his supporters assumed control of the city party. For the next seventeen years the ongoing war between Sullivan and Harrison was to be a central theme of Democratic politics in Illinois.⁶

Usually backing Harrison was Sullivan's most powerful and vocal critic, William Jennings Bryan. The feud with Bryan had its origins in 1896 and the Great Commoner's first campaign for the presidency. Sullivan and Hopkins, as good Cleveland Democrats (like Woodrow Wilson), supported the Gold Democratic candidate, James Palmer. In the following years they did their best to undercut Bryan's support. In 1898, for example, they induced the Iroquois Club, the organization of the Chicago Democratic leadership, to withhold an endorsement of the Nebraska Democrat and his stance on free silver. Only secession from the club led by a young liberal judge named Edward F. Dunne persuaded the organization to reverse its position, but Sullivan and his partner remained hostile. In 1904, they achieved a measure of success by helping to deny Bryan the presidential nomination, and by thwarting the Great Commoner's attempt to unseat their delegation. He reciprocated two years later with a very public but unsuccessful attempt to force Sullivan to resign from his position as national committeeman. By this point Sullivan's antagonism with Bryan had become personal, and although there were brief periods of apparent reconciliation, the two men remained bitter antagonists.⁷

Despite his enemies, Sullivan and his associates prospered. By 1902, they controlled the state apparatus of their party, and by 1906, they were close to overthrowing the Harrison followers in Cook County. Moving ever forward, Sullivan's success was

6. Carter H. Harrison, *Stormy Years: The Autobiography of Carter H. Harrison, Five Times Mayor of Chicago* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1936), pp. 79, 199-203, 251.

7. *Chicago Tribune*, 2 February 1898, p. 12; 5 October 1905, p. 4; 1 August 1906, pp. 1,3; 1 September 1906, p. 2; 2 September 1906, p. II:2; 14 September 1906, p. 7; 15 September 1906, p. 7; 16 September 1906, p. 6; 20 September 1906, p. 4; 22 September 1906, pp. 3, 7.

founded in his ability to appeal to the mutual self-interest of the state's professional political leaders. Almost never the dictator, Sullivan came to occupy a role that was surprisingly egalitarian within his organization. He could, when necessary, be ruthless, but he was also thought to be a "a trifle softhearted." He generally preferred harmony to confrontation. For years he, Hopkins, and their lieutenants, including Sullivan's eventual successor, George Brennan, held regular court at the Sherman House hotel in an atmosphere of openness and camaraderie, at which decisions were debated and strategy planned. Through his even-handedness and intelligence, Sullivan was able to inspire loyalty, confidence, and even affection from some of the most hard-boiled political operatives in the nation. Doubtlessly strengthening their bond was that they, unlike the Harrisonites, were not usually called upon to focus their attentions on their leader's personal ambition for elective office. Freed therefore from marshalling their resources for a particular election and set of issues, Sullivan's men could pick and choose their elective fights to their own best advantage.⁸

It was in large part due to this avoidance of issues in favor of the pursuit of power within the party that allowed Sullivan so easily to weather the storms of reformist agitation that broke in Chicago and Illinois in the first decades of the twentieth century. In 1905, for instance, Sullivan opted to support the emerging mayoral candidacy of the aforesaid Edward F. Dunne. As president of the Ogden Gas Company, he might have been expected to be less than enthralled with Dunne's calls for municipal ownership of utilities. However, the opportunity to depose Harrison as mayor by taking advantage of the popular demand for reform that centered on Dunne was not to be missed. When it became clear that patronage was not to be forthcoming from Mayor Dunne, and, more importantly, when it seemed certain that he could not be reelected, Sullivan opportunistically abandoned him.⁹

Five years later, Sullivan showed equal finesse in avoiding

8. *Ibid.*, 15 April 1920, p. 3.

the fallout that followed in the wake of the Lorimer scandal. William Lorimer was a powerful Republican boss who in 1909 was elected United States senator by the state legislature. Charges emerged of vote buying in his selection, and after three years of controversy he was expelled from Congress. Sullivan, as the leader of the most visible Democratic machine, was a natural target of the ensuing reformist wrath. Wisely, he declined to become involved in the 1912 race for his party's gubernatorial nomination; this despite the fact that the leading candidate was Dunne, who had urged his own bid for renomination as mayor in 1911 with attacks on Sullivan. Now Sullivan and his cohort concentrated upon their war with Carter Harrison and his followers (known as the "H-H" faction because of an alliance with William Randolph Hearst and his two Chicago newspaper).¹⁰

The struggle between the two groups in 1912 brought about a series of comic-opera scenes with counter-conventions at both the Cook County and state Democratic gatherings. As a result, two state delegations went to the National Convention in St. Louis. In the end, it was the Sullivan representatives that were seated, helped by the supporters of Woodrow Wilson, governor of New Jersey and a candidate for the presidential nomination.¹¹

Sullivan already had a limited personal relationship with Wilson, a reformer who was not above working with political bosses, and he returned the favor by helping the New Jersey governor secure the nomination. Indeed, it would be claimed by

9. Richard Allen Morton, *Justice and Humanity: Edward F. Dunne, Illinois Progressive* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), p. 46. The best overview of the state in this period is provided in Donald F. Tingley, *The Structuring of a State: The History of Illinois, 1899-1928*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980). The best summary of the broader progressive issues, with an outstanding historiography provided in the bibliography and notes, can be found in Thomas R. Pegram, *Partisans and Progressives: Private Interest and Public Policy in Illinois, 1870-1922* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

10. Townsend, *Illinois Democracy*, pp. 285-87. For a full account of the Lorimer scandal, see Joel Arthur Tarr, *A Study in Boss Politics: William Lorimer of Chicago* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971).

11. Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: the Road to the White House* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), pp. 440-41, 459-60.

some that the Chicago leader had “made” Woodrow Wilson. While this was clearly an exaggeration, Wilson’s election as president marked a clear watershed for Roger Sullivan. Most obviously, it strengthened his hand in his war with the H-H faction, which had initially backed Missouri’s Champ Clark for the nomination. More importantly, it was the connection with the president that was to be the basis of Sullivan’s growing ambition for what would be later called “respectability.” This quest for greater acceptance also revealed itself in Sullivan’s interaction with now Governor Dunne (also elected in 1912). It was the Chicago boss who resolved a lengthy and acrimonious speakership fight in the Illinois House, which threatened the new governor’s ambitious reform agenda. Similarly, he avoided all public appearance of opposition to the governor and his program.¹²

With a record of support of both the Wilson and Dunne administrations, Sullivan was now prepared for his move into the public forum of high elective office, and perhaps a position of national leadership as well. With typical political acumen, he calculated that the senatorial elections of 1914 would provide the ideal opportunity for his now apparent ambitions. For one thing, the Democratic Party in Illinois was in its strongest position since before the War Between the States. The year 1912 had witnessed a bitter breakup of the majority Republican Party, and the subsequent emergence of a separate state Progressive Party. This division had made possible the election of Governor Dunne, and in 1914 there was no good sign that the breach would heal. For another, a new direct primary law and the recently ratified Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution postulated a mandate from the voters themselves that might go far towards vitiating his image as a corrupt political boss. Should he win, no one would ever be able to accuse Roger Charles Sullivan of buying his election as William Lorimer had allegedly done. Thus on 19

12. *Ibid.*, Townsend, *Illinois Democracy*, I:287; Joseph P. Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson As I Knew Him* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1921), pp. 98-100; *Chicago Tribune*, 15 April 1920, p. 3; Morton, *Justice and Humanity*, p. 69.

January 1914, Sullivan formally announced his candidacy for the Democratic senatorial nomination. In his statement he presented himself as a Wilson loyalist and as an experienced but public-spirited businessman who favored expanded governmental regulation. "We are in an advanced and new era . . .," he wrote:

The big problem today is how to secure the greatest measure of comfort and happiness for our neighbors as well as for ourselves . . . based upon realization that the welfare of the individual everywhere is inseparably interwoven with that of the community. The rights of the individual are to be preserved, even if, by so doing so . . . the supposed rights of the combined are compromised.

Then after comparing President Wilson to Abraham Lincoln, Sullivan made his position on government and business specific:

I long ago came to the conclusion that large business organizations, especially public service companies, should . . . accept one of two alternatives — namely government regulation or government ownership of the source of supply.

This was followed by praise for Governor Dunne and an endorsement of the principle of the primary election. While his position was not unlike that of many businessmen of his day (see Robert Wiebe's classic *Businessmen and Reform*), to his opponents his progressive stance seemed the height of hypocritical self-promotion and his platform was never seriously addressed. On the other hand, there is no reason to believe that had he been elected that he would have not been loyal to the policies of Woodrow Wilson, a man he admired and accepted as his leader.¹³

Sullivan's announcement sent waves of consternation

throughout the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, but inspired little immediate action. The H-H faction made no move, and Governor Dunne, aware of his need of the Chicago leader's support for his reelection in 1916, made his neutrality known. Similarly, Democratic Senator J. Hamilton Lewis, a close ally of the governor's, made it clear that he was "out of politics" as far the senatorial nomination was concerned. Such was the power of Sullivan and the lack of unity of purpose among the progressive Democratic leadership, that things might have remained so but for the intervention of William Jennings Bryan, now United States Secretary of State. In the February issue of his magazine, *The Commoner*, he issued a clarion call for battle. Under the title, "SULLIVAN, SENATOR? NO!" he declared his belief that "the democrats [sic] of Illinois should know it [is] . . . time to thwart his purpose, for it is unthinkable that he should be chosen for a seat in the United States Senate." The reason for this was that "He is to the democratic [sic] party what Senator Lorimer was to the republican [sic] party." Moreover, Sullivan's nomination would spell disaster for the entire Democratic state ticket.¹⁴

The Secretary's intervention was correctly interpreted as his first break with the policies of the president, whose official disinterest in the nomination had been made public. For that reason, as well as a healthy recognition of Sullivan's power, Governor Dunne remained uncommitted, and Harrison could not move on his own. Other less powerful reform Democrats were less reticent and met in Springfield on 9 February 1914, as something called the Wilson-Bryan League. Over two hundred people were in attendance including declared senatorial candidates Frank D. Comerford and Carl Vrooman, as well as such prominent figures as Congressman Henry T. Rainey, Oklahoma's Senator Robert B.

13. Chicago Tribune, 18 January 1914, p. 1:2; Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform. A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1962). Sullivan was not the only political boss to support specific reform measures; see John D. Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973).

14. *Chicago Tribune*, 20 January 1914, p. 3; 13 February 1914, p. 2; 20 February 1914, pp. 1:8; *The Commoner*, February 1914, p. 2.

Owen, and Joseph Folk, former reform governor of Missouri. The presence of Owen and Folk illustrated the significance of Sullivan's candidacy to reformers throughout the nation. There were speeches laden with invective, but no candidate to oppose the object of their scorn was named. Secretary Bryan declined to endorse the League; he was not going to bypass Dunne and Harrison, neither of whom participated directly or indirectly in the gathering. Without support from either of its two namesakes, the League despite its initial claims of ten thousand adherents quickly faded.¹⁵

Bryan instead sought to induce Dunne to enter the race. The Governor dutifully traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss things with the Secretary, and then visited William Randolph Hearst in New York City, who reportedly offered the support of his two Chicago newspapers. However, upon his return to Illinois he made it clear that "he was not a candidate in any sense of the word." It was far from certain that he could win either the primary or the general election, and it was very certain that his entry would sacrifice Sullivan's support for a reelection bid in 1916. Dunne did agree to join with Bryan and Harrison in finding a suitable candidate to oppose the Chicago leader.¹⁶

There was certainly no lack of candidates from which to choose. Besides Vrooman and Comerford, those who had declared for the nomination included Lieutenant Governor Barrett O'Hara, Secretary of State Harry Woods, Congressman Lawrence Stringer, state Senator Kent E. Keller, and James Traynor. None were initially deemed acceptable. Bryan's personal choice was Vrooman, who was even now vigorously campaigning against Sullivan. However, because he was relatively new to the state and had "been so thoroughly stamped with the 'dry' idea [on the liquor issue] that his candidacy would be a difficult one to make effective in Cook County," he was eliminated from consideration. More acceptable

15. *Chicago Tribune*, 8 February 1914, p. 1:6; 10 February 1914, pp. 1, 4; 11 February 1914, p. 7; 14 February 1914, p. 13.

16. *Ibid.*, 17 February 1914, pp. 1, 2; 20 February 1914, pp. 1, 8; 26 February 1914, p. 5; 27 February 1914, p. 4.

to Bryan, Dunne, and Harrison was Congressman Henry T. Rainey of Illinois' twentieth district. A dynamic man with a progressive record, Rainey confounded the three by refusing even Bryan's direct appeals. Next the Secretary urged the consideration of Judge Owen P. Thompson. Although not a declared candidate, he was widely admired and had no factional enemies. Moreover, he had served as Illinois campaign manager for Bryan's 1908 bid for the presidential nomination. Governor Dunne liked him and had appointed him to the Public Utility Commission, but questioned his suitability because of his "dry" propensities. Nonetheless, the Governor arranged a meeting and offered an endorsement. While flattered, Judge Thompson refused to enter the race for fear it would be "a political mistake."¹⁷

By this point many Democratic progressives were becoming impatient. It was now early summer and the supposed leaders of the reform wing had yet to propose a candidate. Carl Vrooman went so far as to accuse the Governor (and by implication Bryan and Harrison) of playing into the hands of Sullivan. While the charge was exaggerated, certainly the lack of dynamic leadership shown was not a source of confidence.¹⁸

In fact, although it was not yet public knowledge, the three had at last found their man, Congressman-at-Large Lawrence Stringer. He had been considered earlier, but because of his past association with Sullivan, he had been placed at the end of the list. With the refusals of Rainey and Thompson, he became the best choice. Having been the unsuccessful Democratic candidate for governor in 1904, he had a statewide reputation. Although a former ally of Sullivan, he had a generally good progressive record and he enjoyed cordial relations with Bryan. Moreover, he met a new

17. Carter H. Harrison to William Jennings Bryan, 11 May 1914, Outgoing Papers, Carter Harrison IV Papers, Newberry Library, Chicago Illinois; Edward F. Dunne to William Jennings Bryan, 25 May 1914, General Correspondence, Box 30, Bryan Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Carter H. Harrison to William Jennings Bryan, 15 June 1914, General Correspondence, Box 30, Bryan Papers; *Illinois State Register* (Springfield), 1 March 1913, p. 6; 13 April 1914, p. 1.

18. *Chicago Tribune*, 2 July 1914, pp. 1, 2.

criterion suggested by Mayor Harrison of being a downstate man. This would allow Dunne the ploy of endorsing someone not to oppose Sullivan but to assure a more equal representation of Illinois. Perhaps just as importantly, he was already an active candidate and clearly wanted the job.¹⁹

On June 1, 1914, Governor Dunne began laying the groundwork with a public call for a candidate who was both a downstater and a supporter of President Wilson. Six weeks later he and Mayor Harrison formally endorsed Stringer. Bryan's announcement of support followed soon afterwards. This clarified the campaign. With the exceptions of James Traynor, O'Hara, Woods, and, of course, Sullivan, the other candidates dropped out of the race. Both Senator Kent Keller and Vrooman would work for Stringer, and Vrooman, perhaps in part as a reward from Bryan, was subsequently nominated by the president to become Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. After nearly six months of indecision and maneuver, and less than a month and a half before the primary election, the state's Democratic progressive leadership had at last acted.²⁰

While his opponents were uncertainly maneuvering towards a candidate, Roger Sullivan was conducting an efficient campaign. In late April he opened his campaign offices at the Hotel Sherman. His manager was Charles Boeschstein, his replacement as Illinois' representative on the Democratic National Committee. Perhaps not coincidentally the state committee headquarters were in the same building, and while not officially taking sides, it was reported as friendly to his candidacy.²¹

Many downstate regulars, including some who had opposed Sullivan in the past, were also moving into his camp. Part of their growing enthusiasm was a desire to back a winner, but they were

19. Carter H. Harrison to William Jennings Bryan, 15 June 1914, General Correspondence, Box 30, Bryan Papers.

20. *Chicago Tribune*, 16 July 1914, p. 13; 17 July 1914, p. 8; 22 July 1914, p. 8; *Illinois State Register* (Springfield), 16 July 1914, p. 1; 19 July 1914, pp. 1,2; 20 July 1914, p. 1; 30 July 1914, p. 1.

21. *Chicago Tribune*, 26 April 1914, p. 1:7; 27 April 1914, p. 8; 29 April 1914, p. 10.

also responding to a recent distribution of federal patronage. Under pressure from Secretary Bryan, and with the excuse that the Democratic senator and governor were the logical distributors of federal plums, President Wilson had handed the matter over to Governor Dunne and Senator Lewis. Ignoring the recommendations of the state committee and its chair (Sullivanite Arthur Charles), they had filled positions with their own men without much reference to the expectations of regular party men. The loss of such important patronage as internal revenue collectors, United States Marshals, and federal District Attorneys was a serious blow to local party organizations downstate, one which engendered fear of the prospect of another senator coming from the Dunne-Lewis-Harrison wing.²²

Assured of strong organizational support and some degree of receptivity from downstate Democrats, Sullivan confounded his enemies with an extensive automobile tour of southern Illinois in a "remarkable and unique campaign, perhaps without precedent." He began on May 11, and for eleven days he visited literally dozens of towns and villages, including Centralia, Waterloo, Nashville, Mount Vernon, Carbondale, and Cairo. Most surprising for contemporary observers was the style of his campaign. Eschewing bands and hoopla, he concentrated upon extemporaneous talks with small crowds in the streets in the daytime and before slightly more formal gatherings in halls at night. In both venues he engaged in good-natured banter with the crowd and friendly debate with those present that had opposed him in the past.²³

Concerning his reputation as a boss, he liked to point out that his very presence underscored his determination to achieve office based upon a popular mandate and not upon that of any organization. He also enjoyed contrasting his campaign with the private conspiring of his reformist opponents in their search for a candidate. As he put it in Edwardsville: "I have gone to the people

22. *Ibid.*, 13 May 1914, p. 4; *Illinois State Register*, 13 May 1914, p. 1.

23. *Chicago Tribune*, 12 May 1914, p. 2.

directly and I question the right or propriety of the use of tactics, the underground variety particularly, which were sent to the scrap heap when the direct election of senators became an actual legal reality." He would then buttress his case by emphasizing his relationship with the president. As to the fact that he came from Cook County, he made a convincing argument that the mutual dependency between Chicago and downstate made the issue meaningless. For the most part, he generally kept his themes positive, and even went so far as (in public at least) welcoming the efforts of Carl Vrooman, who came into southern Illinois after the first week to counter with his own speeches those of Sullivan.²⁴

The "populist" tactic worked, and his tour was effective in countering his image as a "big fish." One downstate Republican newspaper (the confusingly named *Carlinville Democrat*) grudgingly admitted that he "has convinced Egyptians [downstaters] that he has neither horns nor cloven feet, and that he is a right good fellow." Echoing this sentiment, one local leader confessed, after hearing Sullivan speak before the student body of Southern Illinois Normal University, that "We came expecting to see a ward boss, one of your Chicago roughnecks . . . Instead, we found a man who knows what he is talking about and is our friend."²⁵

Whether kissing babies downstate or in his subsequent campaign in Chicago, Sullivan frustrated his opponents by refusing to engage in invective. Even Bryan's original blast in February and one that followed in March evoked only mild rebukes for meddling in the affairs of Illinois. It made little sense for him to answer his opponents. As the front runner, it served no purpose to further alienate those whose support he hoped to have after he secured the nomination. Moreover, replying would only allow them to define the campaign's issues. On the whole, Sullivan's positive rhetoric and campaign style were highly effective in undercutting his

24. *Ibid.*, 14 May 1914, p. 4; 15 May 1914, p. 9; 19 May 1914, p. 1; 21 May 1914, p. 15; 22 May 1914, p. 4.

25. *Carlinville Democrat*, 29 May 1914, p. 4; *Chicago Tribune*, 21 May 1914, p.15.

enemies' hope to brand him in the eyes of the rank and file of the party as (in the words of one editorial writer) "A Man of Belial."²⁶

In contrast, the efforts of Sullivan's progressive opponents were limited and badly coordinated. To be sure, Lawrence Stringer had been campaigning for months. However, his pronouncements were largely ignored and public attention instead was focused upon the triumvirate of Bryan, Dunne, and Harrison (Senator Lewis having successfully avoided participation).²⁷ Ironically, the Great Commoner, who had begun the crusade against the Chicago leader, never came to Illinois to lead the charge. The source of this appears to have been pressure from President Wilson, whose displeasure over Bryan's initial pronouncements against Sullivan was purposely leaked to the press. William F. McCombs, chairman of the Democratic national committee, came to Chicago in July to outline the official administration policy, which forbade federal appointees from performing "managerial duties for any candidate" and whose activities "shall not go to the point where the question could be raised as to loyalty to the primary nominee." In an obvious reference to the Secretary of State, McCombs went on to state that "the Democratic primary in Illinois should be conducted without any outside influence." In consequence, William Jennings Bryan, allegedly because of "Washington business," had to content himself with occasional editorial attacks in *The Commoner*.²⁸

Instead it fell to Carter Harrison to head the attack. Beginning on 26 August, the Mayor appeared in a series of massive rallies in Chicago where Sullivan's support was strongest. However, to the surprise of many he promised publicly not to engage in "personalities" nor to be "acrimonious." Allegedly this was at the request of Stringer, who also appeared at the gatherings, but attracted little attention; it is tempting to see the influence of

26. *Chicago Tribune*, 11 February 1914, p. 6; 15 February 1914, p. 1:5; 15 March 1914, p. 1:6; 10 July 1914, p. 13; 19 July 1914, p. 1:4; 2 Corinthians 6:15, Belial was another name for Satan. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* he becomes a separate fallen angel, one of Satan's lieutenants.

27. *Chicago Tribune*, 16 July 1914, p. 13; 13 August 1914, p. 9.

28. *Ibid.*, 17 February 1914, p. 1; 30 July 1914, p. 7; 23 August 1914, pp. II:1, 2.

McComb at work here. Nonetheless, Mayor Harrison found no difficulty in attacking Sullivan for, among other things, not being a Democrat in the tradition of Stephen A. Douglas and Woodrow Wilson, causing the defeat of William Jennings Bryan, and for being "A man of gas," whose business associations disqualified him for high office.²⁹

Three days later Governor Dunne joined Harrison and struck similar themes. Sullivan, it seems, had not just repeatedly betrayed his party in refusing to support Bryan in 1896 and himself in 1907, but had sabotaged his efforts as mayor to bring fairer gas prices to the city. Moreover, according to the governor, Roger Sullivan was a "corporation" man whose first instincts were to protect the power of the wealthy. For the next two weeks, until primary eve on 8 September, the two, usually accompanied by Stringer, stumped the city.³⁰

Meanwhile, the object of their scorn was concluding the campaign in Chicago and northern Illinois that he had begun on 18 July. As always he was taking the high road of statesmanlike detachment and was declaring his support of such things as better roads and the needs of farmers. He did feel the necessity to respond to the aspersions upon his party regularity by what he called "The Perpetual Office Seekers' Protective Association" and pointed to the fact that it was he and not Carter Harrison who had led the state's delegation to the last three Democratic National Conventions. The most serious charge to emerge from the Sullivan campaign came not from the candidate but from his ally, state Attorney General Patrick Lucey. Just ten days before the primary election, Lucey issued a statement that accused Stringer, as the Democratic choice for senator in the legislature in 1909, of at least acquiescing in the selection of the now infamous William Lorimer. As proof Lucey pointed to the fact that the progressive Democrat

29. *Ibid.*, 26 August 1914, p. 8; 29 August 1914, p. 13.

30. *Ibid.*, 29 August 1914, p. 13; 31 August 1914, p. 8; 3 September 1914, p. 9; *Illinois State Register* (Springfield), 4 September 1914, p. 6.

had subsequently accepted an appointment by Republican Charles Deneen to the state court of claims. Stringer professed to be astounded.³¹

Primary day, 9 September 1914, dawned with predictions of victory by all concerned. As was usually the case, Roger Sullivan proved to have the more acute political judgement. He won with forty-seven percent of the vote. Stringer was a distant second with thirty-seven percent, followed by state Secretary of State Harry Woods with eight percent, Lieutenant-Governor Barrett O'Hara with five percent, and James Traynor, who barely garnered three percent. Cook County alone had virtually guaranteed Sullivan's victory with over 35,000 votes over the combined total of his opponents, but he had done surprisingly well elsewhere. In all he secured majorities or pluralities in nineteen downstate counties, including White, Clay, and Jasper.³²

The progressive coalition promptly collapsed. Lawrence Stringer immediately wired his support. William Jennings Bryan remained, in public at least, thereafter silent. Carter Harrison agreed to make a general harmony speech (in return for temporarily uncontested control of the Cook County Democratic Committee), and Governor Dunne, with seeming enthusiasm, openly embraced Sullivan at the state convention called to ratify the primary results. As he put it: "every true Democrat is bound to acquiesce in the will of the majority as expressed at the polls." He went further and proclaimed that "At no time in the history of the Democratic Party is it more incumbent upon Democrats to be loyal to the party nominee." In return Sullivan asked the governor to write the party platform and called in his keynote speech for "Laws to stop the criminal practices of big business."³³

Not everyone fell into line. The Illinois Democratic

31. *Chicago Tribune*, 19 July 1914, p. 1:4; 25 August 1914, p. 12; 28 August 1914, p. 7; 29 August 1914, p. 13; 30 August 1914, pp. II:1, II:2; 1 September 1914, p. 7; 4 September 1914, p. 9.

32. *Ibid.* 6 September 1914, p. 1:6; 8 September 1914, p. 12; James Langland, comp., *The Chicago Daily News Almanac and Year-Book for 1915* (Chicago: *The Chicago Daily News Company*, 1916), p. 522.

congressional delegation, for instance, voted to neither support nor oppose Sullivan. Of far greater importance was the movement of many lesser reform Democrats behind the Progressive Party candidate, Raymond Robins, who had been nominated on 19 September at his party's convention in Urbana. Robins was a nationally known social activist and Chicago intellectual. He was also a close friend of Governor Dunne. In 1906 as mayor of Chicago, the governor had appointed Robins, who was then superintendent of the Municipal Lodging House, to the Chicago Board of Education. Subsequently, Robins had become an important organizer and leader of the national and state Progressive Parties. Included in this mass defection were most of the leaders of the Wilson-Bryan league, including John J. Fitzpatrick, President of the Chicago Federation of Labor, Carl Vrooman, now Assistant Secretary of Agriculture, his brother, Hiram Vrooman, and George Sikes, a former associate of the late Governor John P. Altgeld. Other normally Democratic figures that would jump on Robins' bandwagon included Jane Addams, Oklahoma Senator Robert L. Owens, Nebraska Congressman George W. Norris, Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Labor, and something called the National Popular Government League, based in faraway New York City.³⁴

All of this fit neatly into the Progressive campaign strategy that assumed that reform Republicans were already in their camp and therefore sought victory by drawing upon the anti-Sullivan Democratic vote. It was a well-conceived plan, and one with which Sullivan would have to contend. His best possible countermove was to secure a ringing endorsement from Woodrow Wilson. However, this was not forthcoming. The president owed Sullivan for shifting Illinois' vote in the 1912 national convention, thus assuring his nomination. On the other hand, he was being

33. *Chicago Tribune*, 10 September 1914, pp. 1, 5, 8; 18 September 1914, p. 5; 19 September 1914, pp. 1, 4; 28 September 1914, p. 7; *Illinois State Register*, 19 September 1914, pp. 1, 2, 9.

34. *Chicago Tribune*, 14 August 1914, p. 7; 19 September 1914, p. 5; 23 September 1914, pp. 1, 4, 8; 20 October 1914, p. 4; 21 October 1914, p. 7; 28 October 1914, p. 7; 29 October 1914, p. 4.

importuned by Bryan, Vrooman and others to withhold his support, which, they argued, would taint his image as a progressive in the 1916 elections. According to Joseph P. Tumulty, the president's political advisor, Wilson in fact recognized his obligation and prepared three drafts of a letter to that effect to Congressman Henry T. Rainey, Sullivan's advocate in Washington, D.C.

However, so Tumulty's account goes, "its release was countermanded by one of the advisors close to Sullivan" (presumably Rainey), for fear of antagonizing Theodore Roosevelt, who was about to begin a tour of Illinois on Robins' behalf. It is difficult to imagine the president caring about upsetting Roosevelt, and, moreover, Tumulty does not explain why such a letter was not released later.³⁵

Thus Sullivan spent most his time defending himself again the Progressive charges. Initially the most serious of those came from Senator Robert Owen, who came to Illinois in early October as a representative of the National Popular Government League. According to Owen, the Democratic nominee was a "bipartisan boss" who had purchased his nomination with massive unreported expenditures. This latter accusation was too serious to ignore, and Sullivan challenged Owen to open a fraud inquiry in the Senate while questioning the veracity of Robins' claim to be financing his own campaign with gold discovered in Alaska!³⁶

Then came Theodore Roosevelt. The former president and Progressive Party leader invaded the state flinging thunderbolts in all directions, but especially at Roger Sullivan. Speaking in Chicago on 19 October, the Colonel characterized him as a vital part of a bipartisan "machine" (that of course included the Republicans), that had plagued Illinois for years, and whose dishonesty had been a matter of public record since the Ogden Gas scandal. Sullivan attempted to reply by calling Roosevelt a "four-flusher" whose words were grander than his actions. Nonetheless,

35. *Ibid.*, 10 September 1914, p. 5; 17 September 1914, p. 9; Tumulty, *Woodrow Wilson*, p. 103.

36. *Chicago Tribune*, 1 October 1914, p. 7.

T.R.'s visit was broadly publicized and was an enormous boost for the Progressive campaign.³⁷ Joining in on the attack were such reformist figures as Jane Addams, John J. Fitzpatrick, and the inevitable Carl Vrooman (and his wife). Their themes were familiar. Sullivan was corrupt and no progressive. Moreover, as Robins himself repeatedly hammered home, his claims to the Wilson mantle were belied by the president's continued silence.³⁸

The Democrats did their best to counter the Progressive line with their own bevy of prominent supporters to lend credibility to Sullivan. On 24 October 1914, Postmaster Albert S. Burleson "as spokesman of the national administration" spoke in Peoria to insist that a vote for Sullivan was a vote for Woodrow Wilson. A few days later, William F. McCombs, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, orated in Chicago and recited Sullivan's role in securing Wilson's nomination. Similarly, Congressman Henry T. Rainey did a journeyman's service for the Democratic nominee by speaking throughout the state. Also Missouri's Senator William J. Stone and Oklahoma's Senator Kern came into Illinois to speak for their friend. Even Governor Dunne and Mayor Harrison got into the act. In the closing weeks of the contest, Dunne canvassed Chicago for Sullivan, while Harrison made some additional carefully constructed calls for Democratic unity. Predictably and pointedly, William Jennings Bryan did not visit Illinois during his tour of the Midwest in late October.³⁹

Another prominent Democrat who did not participate was former senatorial candidate and Illinois Secretary of State Harry Woods. Said by some to have been showing signs of mental instability, and by still others to be perfectly fine, he was found on 12 October dead from gunshot wounds in his garage, an apparent

37. *Ibid.*, 25 September 1914, pp. 1, 4; 14 October 1914, p. 9; 20 October 1914, p. 4; 21 October 1914, p. 7.

38. *Ibid.*, 3 October 1914, p. 8; 5 October 1914, p. 10; 15 October 1914, p. 4; 23 October 1914, p. 5; 28 October 1914, p. 7; *Tribune-Times* (Carmi, Illinois), 15 October 1914, p. 2.

39. *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1914, p. 9; 21 October 1914, p. 7; 22 October 1914, p. 5; 23 October 1914, p. 5; 24 October 1914, p. 5; 25 October 1914, p. 1; 26 October 1914, p. 5; 27 October 1914, pp. 1, 8; 30 October 1914, p. 5.

suicide. An audit of the books of his office found nothing untoward. To replace him, Governor Dunne appointed Lewis G. Stevenson, the son of former Vice President Adlai Stevenson and father of the future governor and presidential candidate.⁴⁰

While he was attempting to fend off the attacks of his progressive opponents, Sullivan virtually ignored his other major opponent, incumbent Republican Lawrence Y. Sherman. He had earlier served as Speaker of the Illinois House, and he had been chosen by direct primary as the Republican candidate for the Senate in 1913. Subsequently, after a bitter fight that gave a full term to Democrat J. Hamilton Lewis, Sherman had been selected by the legislature to complete the last two years of William Lorimer's term. While in the Senate he had compiled a moderately progressive record. Moreover, he had at first supported Roosevelt in 1912, but had declined to follow him out of the Republican Party.⁴¹

Consequently, he was now being labeled by Roosevelt and Robins as a reactionary and as a creature of a mythical Lorimer-Sullivan machine. Sherman responded by comparing Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" (the Colonel's Progressive party platform of the 1912 elections) to the political philosophies of Karl Marx and Eugene Debs, leader of the American Socialist Party, and their attacks upon him as a "fantastic Punch and Judy performance." More seriously, Sherman entertained strong doubts about the constitutionality of the "pure democracy" advocated by the Progressives. However, as they were largely focusing their efforts against Sullivan, he was generally free to concentrate his campaign against the Wilson administration in general and the lowered tariffs of the Underwood Law in particular, while saying almost nothing

40. *Illinois State Register*, 13 October 1914, pp. 1, 2.

41. *Chicago Tribune*, 17 September 1914, p. 9; 18 September 1914. For more information on the Republican side of the contest see William T. Hutchinson, *Lowden of Illinois: The Life of Frank O. Lowden, Volume I: City and State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), and Douglas Bukowski, *Big Bill Thompson, Chicago, and the Politics of Image* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

about his Democratic rival for the senate.⁴²

By election eve all sides had in those days before advanced polling samples some cause for optimism. The Progressives, of course, were confident that a sufficient number of moderate and liberal Democrats would find Sullivan so repugnant as to guarantee a victory for Robins. The Republicans, on the other hand, had every hope of healing the breach of 1912 and drawing back enough Progressive voters to reelect Sherman. The Sullivan campaign based its chances upon a repeat of the 1912 elections in which the normally dominant Republican vote would be split with the Progressives, creating a Democratic plurality. In the end it was close. Sullivan took 373,403 votes or 36.76% of the total, a loss of just one-percent from the victories of two years earlier. Sherman, however, won with 390,661 votes or 38.46%, a Republican increase of over ten percent from 1912, most of which came from the Progressives, whose totals fell from 26.09% in 1912 to 19.99% or 203,027 votes in 1914.⁴³

Obviously, the election signaled the decline of the Progressive Party and its hopes to remain viable. The results were paralleled throughout the nation, and Theodore Roosevelt himself conceded privately that "I don't think they can much longer be kept as a party." The party would limp along until 1916 when Roosevelt committed infanticide by returning to the G.O.P. fold, but it was now clear in Illinois that the Republicans had resumed their traditional role as the state's majority party.⁴⁴

The effect of the elections and the trends they symbolized were less immediately apparent but equally profound in the Democratic Party. In June 1914, William Jennings Bryan predicted

42. *Chicago Tribune*, 25 October 1914, p. 1:5; *News Gleaner* (Shawneetown, Illinois), 18 September 1914, p. 4.

43. Walter S. Rogers, "The Embarrassing Mr. Sullivan," *Harper's Weekly* 59 (October 1914), pp. 394-95; Howard W. Allen and Vincent A. Lacey, *Illinois Elections, 1818-1990: Candidates and County Returns for President, Governor, Senate, and House of Representatives* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), pp. 277-79.

44. Joseph L. Gardner, *Departing Glory: Theodore Roosevelt as ex-President* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 328.

in one of his editorials that Sullivan's selection by the party "would enable him to dominate the organization of the party and give him a chance to project his evil influence into the years to come." The Great Commoner was correct. Within two years of the November election, all of the progressive leadership had been removed from power. First to go was Carter Harrison, who was decisively defeated for renomination as mayor in April 1915 by Sullivan candidate Robert M. Sweitzer. Republican William Hale Thompson, who proved to be Chicago's most infamous mayor and a man who set a new standard for political machinism, trounced Sweitzer in turn. Next out was William Jennings Bryan. On 9 June 1915, he resigned as Secretary of State over the Wilson administration's response to the sinking of the Lusitania. Cut off from further influence over the president, Bryan never again exercised a significant voice in the Illinois Democratic Party. Finally, Governor Dunne was unsuccessful in his bid for reelection in 1916 against the Republican nominee, Frank O. Lowden.⁴⁵

Well before Dunne's loss (in part due to the lukewarm support of the Sullivanites), Roger Sullivan had achieved a complete victory over the remains of the Harrison organization in the primary elections of April 1916. Dominant now in the Chicago, Cook County, and state Democratic committees, and given fealty by local organizations throughout the state, he was absolute master of the Illinois Democracy, a fact subsequently recognized by the Wilson administration that passed over control of federal patronage. Even Senator J. Hamilton Lewis, the last of the original Democratic progressive coalition, sought Sullivan's support in his ill-fated reelection bid in 1918. Similarly, when Governor Lowden effectively suspended the state's government at American entry into World War I by creating a State Council for Defense, he turned for Democratic representation to John P. Hopkins, Sullivan's closest ally, and upon Hopkin's death in October 1918, to Sullivan himself. At the time of his death on 14 April 1920, Roger Charles

45. *The Commoner*, June 1914, p. 2.

Sullivan was as powerful a political boss as the state of Illinois had ever seen.⁴⁶

Thus it was that with the election of 1914, progressive reformism became a declining force in Illinois' political culture. This was perhaps fated, reflecting an impending diminution of reform throughout the country. Certainly the attempt to create a viable independent third party by Republican progressives proved impossible in both state and nation. However, within the state Democratic Party, the effective destruction of the reform wing and the values it represented was far from inevitable. As 1914 dawned, allied reformers controlled the governor's chair, the mayoralty of Chicago, and the one Democratic Senate seat, and they were backed by a myriad of lesser officials and political activists. Moreover, they had the official support of the national administration in Washington, which meant control of federal patronage. By the end of the year, however, they had been steamrolled with ease by a political boss, and the process of their dissolution had begun. Within two years, there was no reform wing and the party was under the control of a single political master. Why did this happen?

At the heart of the progressive failure was a breakdown of leadership. The Democratic reformers had two viable options in confronting the Sullivan candidacy. The first was to declare total war against the political boss. This was clearly what Bryan, Harrison, and the patrons of the Wilson-Bryan League sought to do. However, this strategy carried high risks, not the least of which was that a Sullivan primary victory would permanently weaken the reform wing, while a Sullivan defeat would not eliminate the Chicago leader and would have left the party bitterly divided. Moreover, there was the danger of alienating the Wilson administration that was making its opposition to such a holy war clear. The second workable strategy was to follow the instincts of

46. *Chicago Tribune*, 12 April 1916, pp. 1, 4; 14 April 1916, p. 10; 14 October 1918, p. 13; 15 April 1920, p. 3.

Governor Dunne and not officially contest Sullivan at all. If he lost the primary well and good, but if he won the prestige of the reformers would not have been diminished. Even if he became senator, he was giving every sign of being willing to work with the reformers in Illinois and in the nation's capital.

Instead the Democratic reform leadership chose to do neither one thing nor the other. A half-hearted crusade was declared for reasons less rooted in principle than in Bryan's personal antagonism and Harrison's factional ambitions. A candidate was not even selected for six months after Sullivan entered the race, and then one was chosen who inspired little enthusiasm. With the notable exception of Carter Harrison, the leaders barely participated in the campaign. Bryan, who started things, gave in to White House pressure and remained outside of Illinois, Senator Lewis took no part, and Governor Dunne only spoke a few times in Chicago. Even their rhetoric was lukewarm. The end result was to make inevitable a Sullivan primary victory that had already become likely. Moreover, the reform wing as a whole emerged from the primary appearing pusillanimous and weak, while Sullivan's position even after his defeat in the general election was immeasurably enhanced. In the end, the reformers' irresolution and clear lack of political judgement were at least as important as Sullivan's ascension to their own demise as an independent and powerful force within the Democratic Party and the state.

In contrast to his reformist opponents, Sullivan was masterful. When rumors first emerged in late 1913 that he might seek the seat in the Senate, they were largely met with amused disbelief by most observers. It was less than two years since William Lorimer had been compelled to resign. Reform seemed to be yet a dominant concern among the voters, and of course, his Democratic enemies held the chief elective positions in the state. To general surprise, he confounded his critics by taking his case directly to the voters and by presenting himself in a manner many found convincing as a civic-minded businessman committed to the policies of Woodrow Wilson. In a few months a man who had been a shadowy political

figure had emerged as a real public leader. This, with his extraordinary organization, guaranteed the primary victory, and played an important role in his subsequent monopolization of power in the party. This, in turn, prepared the way for machine control of the Democratic Party for decades, climaxing with the reign of Mayor Richard J. Daley. While he would never obtain high elective office, Roger Charles Sullivan's 1914 campaign for the Senate proved to be "one of the most striking and significant developments of practical politics" in the history of the Illinois.⁴⁷

47. *Ibid.*, 30 August 1914, pp. II:1, II.2.