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A BIOGRAPHY OF JOSEPH T. ROBINSON

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CHAPTER I

EARLY YEARS, 1872 - 1900

On July 14, 1937, the nation was shocked to learn of the death of one of its beloved and respected statesmen in Washington, D. C., Senator Joseph Taylor Robinson of Arkansas. As Majority Leader of the Senate, Robinson died in the midst of the spirited battle over the controversial Supreme Court bill. This measure, providing for a maximum increase of six members in the Supreme Court and a general speed-up of the whole judicial process, had come without warning from the President himself. Bitter and heated arguments on the measure had torn the Senate for a period of five months. Senators felt the patronage lash of Roosevelt and Farley, who demanded their support of the bill, and the hostile attitude of constituents who demanded its defeat. Senate Democrats were further divided between their loyalty to Robinson as Senate leader and their own convictions as to the constitutionality and advisability of the bill.

So intense had the debate become that a week before

Robinson's death Doctor Royal S. Copeland, senator from New York, had rushed to the Majority Leader's side and said, "Joe, the cause isn't worth it. If you don't calm down, you'll die on this floor."¹ But Robinson would not calm down, for his power as Democratic leader had been openly challenged, and he was determined to secure the enactment of this measure. Now in dramatic fashion, Robinson's death ended any possibility of the passage of the controversial measure.

For four years this astute parliamentarian had held the unwieldy majority together and had guided through a mass of New Deal legislation including some measures he did not personally approve. Even the compromise draft of the Supreme Court bill was his own revision of Roosevelt's original measure which Robinson believed had no chance of passing the Senate. Yet, his loyalty to the President never wavered; his honesty was never doubted; and his sincerity was never questioned. As a key figure in the administrative program, he often spent the evening hours in study and the morning hours at a breakfast conference with President Roosevelt as they mapped out their legislative strategy. To the Democratic Party he was both "wheel horse" and "balance wheel."

¹Ardmore Chronicle (Pennsylvania), editorial, July 16, 1937, Robinson Clippings. The Robinson collection consists of personal correspondence, scrap-books, and newspaper clippings. This material is currently in the possession of the author.

Metropolitan newspapers noted his passing as a tragic loss to the Roosevelt program. As a loyal Democrat, he demanded party regularity above personal convictions and served as a "sage and moderating influence" in shaping the administration's plans. Several editors saw no Democrat of similar stature and considered his possible successors as pygmies in the shadow that he left. His balanced judgment and common sense inspired national confidence that he would not champion dangerous ism's or wild theories. His granite determination, his fighting disposition, and his forthright stand on legislative problems generated respect and affection throughout the nation.²

Papers of lesser note spoke of his death as the most "severe blow" the New-Deal legislative program had yet sustained. They pictured him as a broad-shouldered straight-shooter who "drew a sharp line of demarcation" between right and wrong with no time to "sugarcoat his words." President Roosevelt called him a "pillar of strength" and likened his death to that of a soldier fallen in battle.³

In the years since his death, Robinson's importance in the enactment of the New Deal legislation is being recog-

²Buffalo News, New York Times, Atlanta Constitution, Los Angeles Times, Philadelphia Evening Ledger, Houston Post, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, St. Louis Star, July 15, 1937, ibid.

³Peoria Star (Illinois), Lexington Herald (Kentucky), Pana Paladium (Illinois), July 15, 1937, ibid.

nized. With his death, the administration lost its strategic leader and pilot in the Senate.

What was his appeal that elected him to office eleven consecutive times? What influences shaped the thoughts and convictions of this stalwart of the Democratic party as he grew up on the central plains of Arkansas? What home ideals made his character as sturdy as an oak?

Lonoke, Robinson's home town just twenty miles east of Little Rock, Arkansas, was a station stop in 1867 on the Rock Island Railroad. It derived its name from a solitary, stately red oak which stood on the edge of the prairie and served as a landmark on intersecting wagon roads. Its commercial life developed around cotton and rice plantations, sawmills, hunting, and livestock. Today the town breathes and lives in an atmosphere of the past, still claiming Joe Robinson as its most distinguished citizen.

Dr. James Madison Robinson (1816-1892), Joe Robinson's father, was born in New York. He left home at an early age and never communicated with his parents. His only brother, a commissioned officer in the army, died in the Mexican War of 1846. Doctor Robinson lived in the states of Illinois, Alabama, and Louisiana, and probably crossed into Arkansas at Memphis by ox-cart in 1844. Eventually, he bought two sections of land and entered 680 acres of this amount under the provisions of the Swamp Selection Act of

1850.⁴ His farm was located seven and one-half miles northwest of Lonoke on the edge of the timbered lands along the old military road.

Doctor Robinson's life centered around his family, his religious activities, and his practice of medicine. He probably received his medical training in New Orleans. He visited his patients on horseback, covering a large portion of the northern part of Lonoke County. A cultured, well-educated man, Doctor Robinson was highly respected in his community, in spite of his domineering tendencies. His appearance, always distinguished, became more impressive in later years with the addition of a long, flowing white beard. His advocacy of prohibition and strict discipline met with approval, but his equally outspoken position on certain church doctrine brought difficulties. Originally a Quaker, he joined the nearby Pleasant Hill Southern Baptist Church. After several years his fellowship was withdrawn because he upheld the doctrine of Christian perfection, which was contrary to Baptist belief. Other local churches, however, invited him to speak from their pulpits, and his interest in religion later resulted in his donation of five acres of his farm for a Methodist Church and cemetery at Concord.

Robinson's mother, Matilda Jane Swaim Robinson (1832-

⁴State Land Book, Lonoke Real Estate and Abstract Co., Lonoke, Arkansas.

1899) of Cherokee extraction,⁵ was born in Columbia, Tennessee. With her family she moved to Arkansas where she was married to Doctor Robinson on December 22, 1852.⁶ Her mother was a Caruthers from Salisbury in the Piedmont area of North Carolina.⁷ Mrs. Robinson, affectionately known as Aunt Jane, was a patient, mild-mannered woman. She reared nine of her eleven children to maturity, and also cared for six orphans. Not only did she feed and clothe this family of seventeen with the help of her daughters, but she also voluntarily plowed and worked with her children in the fields. Joseph Taylor Robinson (August 26, 1872-July 14, 1937), was the fourth son and the ninth child.

The first Robinson home was built in traditional frontier fashion, the neighbors helping with the raising of the axe-hewn logs, forty-eight feet in length, fastened at the corners with wooden pegs. The roof was of post-oak clapboards, and the walls were chinked with mud; a breezeway divided the kitchen and dining room from the sleeping quarters. Their second home, built further from the road, was

⁵Sarah Catherine Robinson Scott stated that her mother (Mrs. Sallie Robinson Scott, a sister of Joe T. Robinson) was about one-fourth Cherokee, and this Indian blood came from her mother's side of the family.

⁶Recorded in the Scott family Bible, Sallie Robinson Scott's home, North Little Rock, Arkansas.

⁷Robinson to Guidonia Robinson, December 14, 1931, Robinson Papers.

of kiln-dried lumber, but it burned in 1902, and with it many family records.⁸

The Robinsons operated a mule-driven cotton gin, which was hand-fed from 150-pound baskets of cotton. This hustling, hard-working crew of brothers and sisters cultivated about two hundred acres of cotton, corn, oats and peas, and developed a six-acre apple orchard.

Providing for a family of such size was a never-ending struggle. Doctor Robinson as a country doctor received little money for professional services. Farm products brought low prices. New clothes, toys, or treats for the children were few and far apart. In order to make some extra money, the children hired out during the busy seasons to hoe or pick cotton and to bale hay. The family further supplemented its income by selling farm produce in Lonoke. Mrs. Robinson picked the vegetables in season each Friday, and either Joe or Ed Robinson drove her to town on Saturday in a farm wagon pulled by two old plow mules, Pete and Beck. She traded at the Daniels and Strauss Mercantile Company, which

⁸Much of this early material came from several interviews with Mrs. Joe T. Robinson, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1950-54; Edward R. Robinson, Lonoke, Arkansas, 1950-54; Grady Miller, Little Rock Arkansas, 1950-54; and Sallie Robinson Scott, North Little Rock, Arkansas, 1950. This material has been corroborated by: Fay Williams, Arkansans of the Years (Little Rock, 1951), 337-44; Dallas Herndon (ed.), Annals of Arkansas (Little Rock, 1947), I, 247-49; Dallas Herndon (ed.), Centennial History of Arkansas (Chicago, 1936), 375; Alonzo Monk (compl.), Arkansas and Its People (New York, 1930), IV, 506-07.

bought her farm produce to prevent her from peddling it through the town. She made her purchases carefully with her limited funds.⁹

The home life of the Robinson family, strict and puritanical, was built on good morals and sound principles of conduct. Doctor Robinson, the family patriarch, exercised unquestioned authority. After the completion of the evening chores, he would assemble the family, hold a conference, settle the disputes of the day, read some verses from the Bible, and close with prayer. Then the group usually gathered around the Mason and Hamlin organ to sing hymns. Most of the children played a musical instrument: Ed, the guitar; Joe, a cornet; and Sallie, the organ. A quartette of Marsena, Sallie, Ed, and Joe sang at community churches, camp meetings, and song festivals.

The Robinson home had the reputation of being the most hospitable one in the community. Neighbors, guests, and travelers received a warm invitation to share the evening meal and spend the night. Each Sunday Mrs. Robinson, with the help of Sallie, prepared a large dinner to feed her hungry brood, and to provide for guests whom Doctor Robinson might invite on the spur of the moment.

Even tramps were never turned away. Ed Robinson once told of a sockless vagrant who came to their house at nine

⁹Interview, Ed Robinson, Lonoke, Arkansas, July, 1950.

o'clock one snowy night and asked for shelter. Doctor Robinson invited him to come in, filled a tub with warm water for his bath, and laid out clean flannels for him to wear while Mrs. Robinson prepared a hot meal. They gave him a feather bed for the night and listened sympathetically the next morning to his pitiful story of losing his family in a boat accident on the Mississippi River. After the shock of this tragedy he had taken to drink until he had lost his self-respect. Upon hearing his story, Doctor Robinson gave the man one of his few dollars, but made him promise to let liquor alone. Years later, this vagabond became a successful merchant in the nearby town of Cabot.

In his early years, Joe was described as a chubby, freckle-faced, barefooted boy who wore a long-tail shirt and rolled-up overalls with one suspender fastened over the shoulder. When he was seven, he hoed his own row in the field, determined to keep up with his older brothers and sisters. Allegedly, nobody could beat him at chopping grass along a row of cotton.¹⁰ He was particularly fond of horses and hunting dogs. Like most boys, he was interested in food, and though the variety was limited he found ample satisfaction in devouring pie, sorghum molasses, and plenty of butter. He enjoyed good health as a child, but in his teens he suffered an attack of fever which almost took his life and

¹⁰Ibid.

which may have weakened his heart. According to the accounts of his contemporaries, his parents found little need to correct him for he appears to have been a dutiful son.

No account of his life would be complete without mention of his quick temper. This personality trait underlay his aggressiveness in public life and was evidenced by occasional personal encounters which led newsmen to speak of him as "Scrappy Joe." In his boyhood, Joe enjoyed fighting as much as eating. On his way to town one Saturday with his mother, he was taunted by some town rowdies, "Mother wants to buy a cabbage! Is your head for sale?" Down from the wagon he jumped and rolled his tormentors in the dirt. Late that day, the town marshal patted Joe on the head and remarked that he had performed his good deed for the day.¹¹

Robinson received his religious training at home and in the Concord community church for which his father had given the land. Subsequently, during a revival meeting, Dr. Andrew Hunter organized this into a Methodist Church; it became a part of the Austin circuit along with Mount Zion, Mount Tabor, Smyrna, and South Bend. The boy joined the church at the age of twelve and later took an active part by ushering, teaching a Sunday School class, speaking on Children's Day programs, and serving as a member of the Board of Stewards. At home he led family prayers when his father was

¹¹Ibid.

absent and assisted Brother Jim in the preparation of his sermons.¹² Through the years he never moved his membership from the Concord church, and he regularly supported its program, giving generously when the minister requested extra contributions. This church made a deep impression on his life. Years later he returned to speak of the Christian people he had known on the Austin circuit and to describe their humble lives:

The names of these men and women whom I have mentioned are not illustrious on the pages of our history. Their lives are not filled with thrilling incidents, or daring deeds. They constitute the brave unconquerable element of our church which had done and is still doing so much for the elevation and betterment of mankind. Many of them have gone through the world embarrassed by poverty and hampered with toil to lonely graves in sorrow. But their tired hands, their weary brains, their disappointed hopes will have hereafter the illimitable reward.¹³

Robinson's formal schooling was very limited. At the age of six he began his studies in a log house on his father's farm. Later, he attended classes for two months under a brush arbor located one mile east of his home, with J. J. Doyne (afterward president of Arkansas State Teachers College at Conway) as his teacher. Five months of school at Prairie Grove, nine months at Union Academy, and five months at Gum "college" completed his public school education. The rural

¹²Letter of Sallie Robinson Scott to the Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), May 31, 1938.

¹³Speech, Mt. Zion, Arkansas, July 11, 1903, Robinson Papers.

schools he attended were the usual one-room, one-teacher variety which accommodated several grades, using as textbooks Webster's blueback speller and McGuffey's readers. Robinson led his class in spelling; and though he was mischievous and full of pranks, he was a good student.

Doctor Robinson's exceptional library of several hundred classical and historical volumes supplemented Robinson's scanty schooling. Each night for years Joe and Ed read by kerosene lamp and firelight in their parents' bedroom until their father sent them to bed. The boys actually wore holes through the floor from propping their chairs against a table as they read by lamp light. The boys read the Bible completely through two or three times. They poured over the novels of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Cooper, Hugo, and Hawthorne. They absorbed the historical writings of Bancroft, Ridley, Morley, Motley, Gibbon, Hume, and Macaulay, and for variety read the poetry of Tennyson, Whitman, Longfellow, Holmes, Whittier, and Bryant. In addition, they read books of law and medicine. Each day as the brothers plowed in the fields, they developed their memories and their speaking abilities by reciting their reading of the previous night. Their literary discussions were overheard and their intellectual growth witnessed only by two indifferent plow mules, Pete and Beck!¹⁴

¹⁴Interview, Ed Robinson, Lonoke, Arkansas, July 21, 1956.

Debating societies were popular in those days, and as early as 1876 the young men of Eagle Township at Pleasant Hill, Concord, and Mount Tabor held debating sessions once a week.¹⁵ On a Sunday School picnic at Concord in 1879, Joe listened to an older brother, "Bedy," give an oration on the "Dignity of Labor" which was described by the reporter as being well-written, admirably delivered, and "short but sweet."¹⁶

Robinson was early recognized as a capable speaker. When he was about seventeen he defended Democracy against the attacks of the Populists and the Agricultural Wheel, an organization composed of farmers in Central Arkansas. From 1886 to 1894 a discontented element of the small farming class opposed the policies of the Bourbon Democrats of Arkansas and sought to organize the Peoples Party. The success of this action would have split the normal Democratic vote and given the Republicans a chance to win the state and local elections. The Populists staged a meeting in Prairie County to stir up the opposition. Colonel A. F. Yapp, having no one available to answer the glib out-of-state speaker, sought out Judge Thomas C. Trimble, Democratic chairman of Lonoke County, who suggested Robinson. At the meeting Robinson remained in the audience listening to the speaker. Then he

¹⁵Lonoke Weekly Democrat, July 13, 1876.

¹⁶Ibid., July 17, 1879.

was introduced as a farm boy who could refute the Populist program. So successful was his impromptu speech that he routed his opponent, who soon left the state.¹⁷

Later Joe and Ed engaged in a debate to raise funds to help pay the Lonoke Methodist Church debt. In old England Hall, Ed upheld the affirmative side of the question, "Resolved: That the Newspapers are a Curse." In philosophical terms he showed the effects of sensational crime reporting in newspapers upon the development of criminal tendencies. But according to reports, he left the audience drowsy and inattentive.¹⁸ When Joe arose to speak, he did not even attempt to refute Ed's excellent argument but gained the immediate attention and support of the crowd by saying, "While my brother was lying under the shade trees reading Shakespeare and Tennyson and gazing at the skies, I was milking the cows, feeding the horses, and churning." Financially, the debate was a success; the \$600 raised was more than enough to wipe out the \$150 deficit.

Robinson was ambitious to further his education, and he chose teaching to earn his initial expenses. In 1889 when he was only seventeen, he was issued a first-grade teacher's license by Lonoke County. The examination covered

¹⁷Interview, Judge Thomas C. Trimble, Jr., Lonoke, Arkansas, July, 1954.

¹⁸Interview, Ed Robinson, Lonoke, Arkansas, July 21, 1950.

orthography, reading, writing, mental and written arithmetic, English grammar, modern geography, and American history. His lowest score was in writing; his highest in modern geography, followed by American history. He taught for two years in the close-by communities of Tanner's Chapel, Mount Carmel, Oak Grove, and Union Academy, and his students considered him a good teacher. Robinson later said that he maintained discipline by "keeping cool," and added, "If you can observe this, you will never act from passion, prejudice, or anger; but you will inspire your pupils with a respect that years of hard labor might fail to give them."¹⁹

Robinson believed that the primary purpose of teaching in the public schools was the inculcation of patriotism through a study of American history, biography, civil government, and national hymns, and by the observance of national holidays.²⁰ From his teacher's salary of \$35 per month (room and board was only \$8 a month), Joe was able in two years to save enough to enter the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville for two years beginning in March, 1891.

Although Robinson enrolled in a Liberal Arts program of Latin, French, Greek, algebra, physics, and geography,

¹⁹Speech on the "Right to Punish--Limitations, The Right of the Directors and Teachers to Establish and Enforce Rules," Robinson Papers.

²⁰Teachers' convention address, Texarkana, Arkansas, August 20, 1896, ibid.

his mind was still on politics, for in the back of his zoology notebook, he wrote a lengthy refutation of the Populist program. He served as a sergeant in the military science program and was very active in the Philomathian Debating Society.²¹ In December, 1891, he appeared on the commencement program upholding the affirmative side of the question, "Affirmed that Arkansas should have an educational qualification for voting." Photographs taken at the university show him to be a tall, slender, smooth-cheeked boy with good facial features and long, dark hair. Returning home at the end of the first school year, he wore a school cap with the letters "AIU" (Arkansas Industrial University). The youngsters of the neighborhood asked its meaning; and Robinson who loved children said jokingly, "They stand for 'Ain't I Ugly.'"²²

Robinson attended the 1895 summer session of the law school at the University of Virginia. He never completed any academic or professional degree but did receive an honorary degree (LL.D) from the University of Arkansas in 1922.

Even as a boy he had shown an interest in politics and the legal profession. One evening young Judge Thomas C. Trimble returned from a campaign tour in Van Buren County and stopped for the night at the Robinson home on his way to

²¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 15, 1928.

²²Interview, Ella High, Lonoke, Arkansas, August 1, 1950.

Lonoke. Doctor Robinson and he talked politics all evening while Joe listened intently until he was sent to bed. The next morning as Joe saddled up the Judge's horse, Trimble looked him over and promised Doctor Robinson that, when the boy was older, he would train him in the law. Doctor Robinson disapproved of Joe's going into the legal profession, but whenever Joe was in Lonoke, he always visited the Judge's law office.

After two years at the University, Joe entered Judge Trimble's office as an apprentice and learned to look up the law and write briefs. He slept in the rear of the one-story law office, which stands today across the street from the Lonoke County Courthouse. He ate his meals in the home of Judge Trimble whose wife came to look upon Joe as her son. His first cases were tried in the Justice of the Peace courts. After an examination in September, 1895, he was permitted to practice law before the Seventeenth Judicial Court in Lonoke County and appeared as a lawyer before this court in February, 1896. In 1897, the law partnership of Trimble and Robinson was organized. On December 17, 1900, Robinson was licensed to practice law before the Supreme Court of Arkansas.²³

His first taste of politics was pleasant. Robinson was related to several influential families who were important

²³Record of Proceedings, Supreme Court of Arkansas, Clerk's Office, State Capitol Building, Little Rock, C-No. 15, 374.

in business, and in local and state politics. He could count on the support of his cousin ex-Governor James P. Eagle and his sponsor Judge Trimble.

Contrary to Trimble's wishes, Robinson canvassed the county in 1893 for the nomination of Judge Carroll D. Wood for Arkansas Supreme Court. In the same campaign he was elected the Lonoke County delegate to the State Democratic Convention. This county delegation was instructed to vote for Judge John Fletcher of Lonoke. When Fletcher withdrew his name before the state convention, Robinson secured six of the ten delegates' votes for Wood and continued to support him until he was nominated.²⁴

This political experience prepared Robinson to run on the Democratic ticket with W. H. Eagle for the two county representatives against the 1894 Populist ticket. Robinson had been a supporter of Cleveland's policies since 1888; his regular reading of material from Democratic National Headquarters accounts for the broad point of view reflected even in his local speeches against Populist principles. He accused the Populists of being socialistic, of planning to merge the individual into the mass of society. Many of the Populist bills before Congress he condemned as being injurious to the South. He denounced government operation of

²⁴Circular, "Let Justice Be Done," issued in 1902 campaign, Robinson Papers.

railroads as more expensive than operation under private ownership and criticized the Sub-Treasury plan of the Populists as "extravagant, untried and impracticable." The total cost of their schemes, he claimed, would amount to 26 billions while the total monetary quantity of the world was estimated at 10 billions. He criticized the Populist movement and her leaders:

Her principles are those of the socialist and those of the anarchist. She holds out a picture of ruin and despair to our citizens: . . . [she is] championed by men who have lost the confidence and respect of their fellows. Professing a great love for the poor [her] representatives in Congress . . . have violated their pledges and discarded their principles at the very moment when the loud noise of their lamentations is heard in the land.²⁵

During the campaign Robinson expressed the hope that the next state legislature would cut down expenses, validate school certificates on a state-wide basis, forbid school directors to run the school district into debt, provide for assessment of taxes by the magistrate in order to approach a uniform system on estimated value, encourage economy and reform, and provide adequate support for charitable institutions.

So thoroughly did Joe campaign throughout the county that months after the election it was said that his horse would automatically stop whenever it met anyone along the

²⁵Speech, "The Proper Tests of a Political Party--Populite," 1894, Robinson Papers.

road. The young Democrat led the county ticket by receiving 1685 votes out of a total of 1803.

At 22 Robinson was the youngest member of the Thirtieth Arkansas Assembly when it convened in January, 1895. After several switches in his vote, he managed to support the victorious candidate for Speaker of the House, J. C. Colquitt. He was appointed to the important Judiciary Committee, as well as the Militia Committee and the County and Probate Courts Committee.²⁶ The outstanding piece of legislation sponsored by Robinson was a bill providing for the regulation and revision of freight and passenger rates of railroads in Arkansas and for the creation of a railroad commission to supervise the act. This commission would have full power to investigate and determine any charge of discrimination or unfairness. Reductions and rebates by railroad companies would be forbidden. Railroads would be required to report immediately any accident for the purpose of investigation by the commission. The bill further provided that any person injured on railroad property could enter suit in the proper local court of that county.²⁷

Attorney Dan Jones, representing the railroad inter-

²⁶Journal of the House of Representatives, State of Arkansas, Thirtieth Session (Little Rock, Arkansas: Brown Printing Company, 1895), 239. Hereafter cited as Journal of the House.

²⁷Forrest City Times (Arkansas), February 22, 1895; Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 21, 1895.

ests, appeared before the House committee hearing and argued his side of the case; but Robinson ably defended his bill and it was favorably reported out of the committee. The bill was under consideration in the House for one week; and at times the debate grew quite bitter. The railroad interests were so strong and well-organized that they soundly defeated the measure on February 28 by a vote of 17 to 67.²⁸ Robinson's capable defense of the bill gave him a statewide reputation, and at the next general election the people overwhelmingly voted to amend the state constitution to provide for a railroad commission. The next General Assembly passed an even more stringent measure than the Robinson bill.

Robinson supported other measures during the 1895 session: a mechanic's lien law, the assessment and taxation of real estate mortgages, a bill to prohibit the sale of cigarettes in the state, a bill for the prevention of extortion by saw mills and corporations, a provision for better enforcement of the laws and ordinances of cities, and a proposed act to prevent railway companies and common carriers from overcharging for transporting cotton-seed meal.²⁹

Other interests outweighed Robinson's political ambitions so that when his term expired, he did not seek re-

²⁸Journal of the House, 721.

²⁹Ibid., 378, 663, 680, 697, 897; Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 8, 1895.

election. Election campaigning and the study of legislative measures took too much time from his legal practice, which he was anxious to establish on a profitable basis. Since 1892 he had managed his mother's farm, paying the taxes, supervising the renters, and keeping the property in a state of repair. His personal responsibility included his 62 year old mother. In October, 1894, he insisted that she make a train trip to visit her daughter Bettie Brewer at Kingsland. Upon her refusal to take her first train ride alone, he accompanied her on the 200 mile round trip excursion.

Another new interest centered in Robinson's courtship of Miss Ewilda Miller. Her mother was Sarah Evelyn Grady of Tennessee; and her father Jesse Miller was wounded at Shiloh fighting on the Confederate side.³⁰ He moved to Lonoke in 1873³¹ and became a successful merchant. Here Ewilda Miller was born in 1876 and was educated in the local public school. She met Joe Robinson through her uncle R. H. Grady on a picnic at Hill's Lake about 12 miles from Lonoke. Fifty-cent excursion tickets offered by the railroad made this a place popular with the young people. After the picnic Joe and Ewilda saw each other at the drug store a few times before they started dating. The Arkansas Democrat's

³⁰The Adjutant General of the U. S. Army to Jesse Miller, September 16, 1929, Robinson Papers.

³¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), June 4, 1921.

account of their wedding, December 15, 1896, reported that the Methodist Church was banked with flowers and crowded with friends. The bride looked very beautiful in her white wedding gown and veil as she met the handsome, gifted speaker at the altar.³² The young couple lived with the bride's parents in a spacious two-story house with a decorative porch extending across the front and down the west side. This was home until they moved to Little Rock in 1912.

During these years Robinson built his law practice but remained active in politics. In 1896 he was selected by the state Democratic convention as one of the eight presidential electors. A fusionist ticket of Democrats and Populists was formed, and Robinson surrendered his place on the national ticket to a fusionist elector. He continued to speak for the national ticket and made more than 100 appearances over the state.

Between national elections he made many public speeches dealing with international topics, such as the Cuban Revolution and the Spanish-American War. Robinson believed that the majority of the people of the United States sympathized with Cuba. Although he generally agreed with President Cleveland's views, he did not see eye-to-eye with the President in his refusal to recognize Cuba as a belligerent, even though such recognition might bring the threat of war

³²Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), December 17, 1896.

with Spain. The attitude of Cleveland's successor, President McKinley, who bowed to the pressure of public opinion, more nearly coincided with Robinson's own views.³³

In the spring of 1898 Robinson discussed with patriotic fervor the three causes which provoked the Spanish-American War: the continuous inhumanity of Spain toward Cuba by appointing incompetent Spanish political parasites and dishonorable Cubans; and the destruction of battleship Maine in Havana harbor. Speaking on July 4, 1898, Robinson's analysis of the probable results of the Spanish-American War upon the United States reflected the prevailing Republican attitude rather than the Democratic position and his prediction paralleled the actual developments that occurred during the twentieth century. He foretold that war would force the recognition of the United States as a first-rate military power; that the war would lead the United States to a more aggressive foreign policy; that retention of the Philippine Islands would compel this country to annex the Hawaiian Islands for coaling stations and naval bases; and that these annexations would force the nation to become a great naval power. He further predicted that the United States would be recognized as an influential factor in international agreements and finally that the war would unite forever the

³³ Fourth of July Speech, 1897, Robinson Papers.

American people, erasing any remaining sectional lines.³⁴

At the 1900 state convention, Robinson made the nominating speech for John Wesley Crockett, a candidate for secretary of state. This occasion gave him an opportunity to assert his belief in the tenets of the Democratic party and to oppose the Republican platform by denouncing trusts, imperialism, the tariff, and the gold standard. In the same year, he was an alternate delegate to the Kansas City Democratic convention that nominated William Jennings Bryan for a second time and he made 67 speeches throughout Arkansas in support of the national ticket that fall. Again he was named one of the presidential electors and this time was chosen to carry the state electoral vote to Washington, D. C.

Robinson during this time developed a political following and received favorable recognition in state political circles. He took advantage of every opportunity to serve his party and to address the people of Arkansas. His growing reputation as an orator brought him many invitations to speak at Fourth of July picnics, veterans' organization meetings, and county-wide gatherings. His speeches, like those of Bryan, were characterized with a dramatic quality, and he captured his audiences with an emotional appeal and flowery oratory. A typical speech of his earlier days, such as this one, was delivered before his fellow-Masons at Clarendon,

³⁴Ibid.

Arkansas, June, 1899, and illustrates his flamboyant style:

In childhood, with the example of my father, a Master Mason, always before me, I conceived an ambition to become a Mason. In the light of the vanishing years I fancy myself listening to the story of my mother's preservation from a brutal soldiery by a brave Mason. During the Civil War, when desolation had laid his unrelenting hand upon the South and drought had withered her flowery fields, while gaunt famine lurked by the lonely fireside and stared into the faces of helpless women and children, a band of drunken soldiers attacked our home in search of booty. In one room my father lay upon his bed tossing in the frightful delirium of a malignant fever. In an adjoining apartment my mother pleaded with the intruders to spare the building that sheltered her defenseless children and my father's emaciated frame from exposure to the elements--begged them not to execute their threats to burn the home. A ruffian had seized a lighted torch and was in the act of setting fire to the building when a young soldier seized a sword and struck the torch from his hand, stepping in front of the drunken coward he declared he would defend that home, the woman, and the children, or die in the attempt. His eye bespoke his courage, and his voice told of an unwavering resolution. In a moment the cruel purpose was averted, the men were riding away and all were safe. As the brave young soldier mounted his horse he saluted my grateful mother and said: "Madam, fear not. You will be disturbed no more while our commander is in this vicinity." He had found in a drawer of a bureau my father's regalia.³⁵

The secret of Robinson's oratorical power, according to comments in the local papers, lay in "its perfect simplicity and sincerity." He possessed "absolute self-control, the faculty of logical thought, and lucid statement." He was "passionately earnest" and had "a resonant voice and a movement full of action." The Lonoke Democrat further commented, "He first captures the eye and the ear and before

³⁵Masonic speech, Clarendon, Arkansas, June 23, 1899, Robinson Papers.

many minutes, the heart."³⁶

In Robinson's early manhood, his interest in law and in politics developed simultaneously. First, law had the advantage but later was outstripped by politics.

³⁶Newsclipping, Lonoke Weekly Democrat (Arkansas), 1902.

CHAPTER II

LAW AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

Joe Robinson developed rapidly as an able lawyer. His political speaking increased his confidence; his wide acquaintances brought many clients; and his forceful pleading secured favorable verdicts. His fortunate association with Thomas C. Trimble provided him with expert tutoring.

Judge Trimble was an excellent lawyer by any standard.¹ He was admitted to the bar in Mississippi in 1873, moved to Arkansas in 1876, and was soon elected prosecuting attorney, and later judge of the seventeenth judicial court. He developed a fine law practice, trying cases in Lonoke, Prairie, Arkansas, Jefferson, and Pulaski Counties. He was described as a man of "infallible judgment," who possessed great power of concentration. But he had his peculiarities. His filing system was such that others could rarely find a document among the papers in his roll-top desk, while he

¹Much of the following material was gathered from 1950 to 1954 in interviews with U. S. Federal District Judge Thomas C. Trimble, Jr., Lonoke, Arkansas; William H. Gregory, lawyer, Little Rock Arkansas, and C. Hamilton Moses, Arkansas Power and Light Company, Little Rock.

could reach in and pull it out with uncanny skill. When his son, Thomas, Jr., returned from the University of Arkansas Law School about 1898, he introduced a scientific filing system, but the Judge claimed that he could never locate anything after that. In 1905 the law firm became Trimble, Robinson & Trimble.

Robinson told several anecdotes about the absent-mindedness of Judge Trimble. Payment of bills and routine family matters seemed immaterial to him. On one occasion after trying a case, he wore the hat and coat of another lawyer to his office and never realized the mistake even though the hat was perched high upon his head and the sleeves of the coat struck him at the elbows. One time as he packed his grip for a trip to California, Mrs. Trimble asked Joe to check it. He found only one collar and a night shirt and returned the grip to Judge Trimble's wife for repacking.

Once his daughters gave him a meerschaum pipe for a birthday present. Trimble, trying it out for the first time in the smoking coach, calmly tossed it out the window. Arriving in Lonoke by train, one day, he stepped across the street to register at the hotel. The clerk looked up and asked, "Judge, your family away from home?" Trimble appeared startled, looked around the lobby, remarked, "So it is," and left the hotel. Yet, in spite of his absent-mindedness, he could relate the details of any case that he had tried within

the previous twenty years.

Judge Trimble was a steady influence in Robinson's life. Once when the young partner had unmercifully rebuked an opposing lawyer, Trimble calmly advised, "You shouldn't have done that. He was representing his client in the best way that he could. You should apologize to him, Joe." Robinson thought it over, then answered emphatically, "You're right," and left the office to do so.

Money seemed unimportant to the partners, Trimble and Robinson. When they needed it, they wrote checks. When C. T. Couch, cashier of the Central Bank of Arkansas, asked them to cover over-drafts, they did so by a joint note or by a check drawn on other accounts.

When Tom Trimble, Jr., entered the firm, he found numerous notes and accounts that represented good claims which had not been collected. On one occasion a Chicago firm insisted that a check of \$1,000 for services of the law firm had been mailed, but nevertheless sent a duplicate. Years later, Tom Trimble, Jr., found the original check which had been used as a bookmark by the Judge.

After Robinson entered the U. S. House of Representatives in 1903, his law practice became merely an adjunct to his political career; he received fees only from those cases in which he actually participated. Toward the end of each session, he would prepare briefs, review the facts of several

cases, and be ready to start trial when Congress adjourned. It was to the advantage of a defendant to hire Robinson, for the judge of the court would automatically grant a continuance of the case until Congress adjourned. In some instances a case would be continued for several months before its final settlement. In civil cases the plaintiff might decide to settle for a lesser figure out of court. In criminal cases the chief witnesses might die, become senile, move away, or forget the facts.

Trimble and Robinson usually sat together during the trials. They complemented each other: Trimble knew the fine points of the law but had a speech impediment; Robinson was considered one of the best advocates who ever faced an Arkansas jury. His dynamic forcefulness never failed to hold the attention of the jury, and his booming voice could be heard beyond the courtroom in the street. He would stamp the floor, gesticulate with both arms, wipe his brow, throw his handkerchief to the table, raise his strong voice, and plead his cause with emotion and vigor. He was a master at cross-examination; he could detect the flaws in the testimony of opposing witnesses, tear into them, and confuse them. Robinson skillfully presented his argument by ignoring the weak spots of his case and emphasizing continually its strong points. At the turn of the century a jury was often influenced more by oratory than by facts. Robinson sensed this

and used his persuasive powers to advantage.

Robinson's knowledge of men and his ability to judge the character of those he accepted for jury service won him many cases. He was uncanny in his selection of men who were sympathetic toward his client. Walter Hendricks, a hunting companion, told this story. Joe started shooting quail in a posted field. Immediately the owner appeared, gestured with his fist, and ordered Joe to leave. Robinson feigned deafness and motioned to the farmer to observe his marksmanship. He was hitting a bird each time one arose. After killing several quail, he gave the farmer as many as he wanted and left the field. Later that year while representing a client in circuit court, Robinson saw this influential farmer waiting in line for jury service. He thought, "Now if I take him, he might defeat my client; but if I refuse him, he might turn his political influence against me." He decided to accept him. The jury selected this farmer as foreman and returned a verdict of not guilty in behalf of Robinson's client. As the jury filed out of the jury box after the trial, the farmer leaned over the rail and said, "You're not near as deaf as you were the day you shot quail on my place."²

Robinson became a recognized criminal lawyer in Arkansas. Though his clients might be unpopular, surprisingly

²Interview, Walter Hendricks, Little Rock, Arkansas, July 30, 1950.

enough, the character of the client never affected Robinson's popularity. His first prominent case was the Eagle-Booe murder trial of 1898. The trouble originated at England, Arkansas, when Charley Booe, a lawyer, was shot from ambush by an assailant believed to be Bob Eagle; Charley Booe was removed to a Little Rock hospital. In Lonoke the Eagles and the Booes operated adjoining stores. W. H. Eagle (father of Bob) fearing the Booes might retaliate, offered to pay the law office expenses of Charley Booe for one year if he would leave Arkansas and settle in Texas. But Will Booe (father of Charley) said that the only satisfactory solution would be a pistol duel at twenty paces.

As soon as Charley could be removed from the hospital, his father and brother brought him to Lonoke on the Saturday morning train. As they left the railroad station, the Eagles took matters into their own hands by firing upon them from behind and killed all three of them. This mass murder developed such an intense fear in the terrified town that many citizens armed themselves but refused to take sides.

During the grand jury investigation, the Eagles became arrogant and carried weapons. One forced his way into the grand jury room and was tossed out of a window. A cowed grand jury returned an indictment of only second-degree murder.

The regular judge disqualified himself, and the

Lonoke County Bar selected Judge T. M. Seawell to preside. Prosecuting Attorney George W. Chapline was assisted by Colonel Vaughn, a one-armed Confederate veteran, whose life had been threatened by the Eagles. So ex-Governor Eagle warned his relatives: "Colonel Vaughn is my friend. If any more threats are made, I'll throw my influence to have you convicted, and I'll kill the man who harms a hair on his head." Robinson and Colonel Murphy, a noted criminal lawyer from Little Rock, served as advocates, and Trimble served as counsellor for the defendants. The courtroom was filled to capacity with many women present.

The trial lasted for several days. Robinson made the closing argument for the defense. He emphasized the importance of the issue, and reminded the jury of its responsibility to weigh the facts and to consider the testimony of the witnesses before they reached a verdict. He related the story of how the spirit of revenge had brought about the stoning of the prophets and the crucifixion of Christ. Referring to the trial of Zola of France, he remarked that these defendants also were entitled to a trial without prejudice before a jury.

Then Robinson described the ferocious character of the Booes, showing that the testimony revealed that Charley Booe was an outlaw. He pictured Charley's father as "fierce, unrelenting, uncompromising, and most dangerous." He empha-

sized that the Booes "had resolved to kill all of the defendants" and had a "reckless disregard of rights and life." The Eagles, he said, "were willing and anxious" to compromise, but the Booes "refused to make any concession whatever." He substantiated this statement by noting the efforts made by outstanding citizens to restore peace between the families. Robinson even claimed the shooting was unavoidable! He rose to his usual bursts of oratory, closing with references to General Lee and the Golden Rule.³ Most people thought Robinson's oratory was responsible for the acquittal, but it was rumored that the wealth of the Eagle family and the fear imposed on the jury were also important factors.

Another famous trial was that of the State of Arkansas v. C. W. (Zed) McAlister, in 1911.⁴ This sensational case grew out of political differences in Lee County over the sheriff's race. B. F. Kirby was assassinated from ambush late in the evening of August 19, 1910, while riding to his plantation nine miles from Marianna. Circumstantial evidence pointed to Zed McAlister, Bob Williams, and Al Sullivan. Movements of these men and their horses placed them in the vicinity of the shooting at about the time it occurred. A broken horseshoe removed from the McAlister horse by the

³State v. R. E. L. Eagle, et al., Case Nos. 624, 625, 626, "Criminal Judgment Docket" Book A, Lonoke County, 1898, 20-23. Notes on trial were taken from Robinson Papers.

⁴McAlister v. State, 99 Ark. 604 (July 10, 1911).

blacksmith who reshod the animal was matched successfully the next day with a broken piece of shoe found in the vicinity of the ambush.

Because of extreme resentment toward McAlister in Lee County, a change of venue brought the trial to Forrest City in St. Francis County. Several capable lawyers of the state defended McAlister; and W. K. Oldham, employer of the accused, requested his friend Robinson to serve as counsel. Even in Forrest City supporters of each faction came armed, and it was necessary to search all who entered the courtroom. Robinson was pleading the case when a bird swooped through an open courtroom window and brushed past him. He thought the shooting had started and immediately dived under the table for safety. Tension was so high the night the verdict was reached that only the attorneys and the court officials were admitted to the courtroom to hear it.⁵ The jury found McAlister guilty, and the judge pronounced sentence of death by hanging.

The defense attorneys were shocked by the verdict, and Robinson was vehement: "I am convinced that we were double-crossed in the selection of the jury by some parties in Forrest City. I do not believe another jury could have been selected in St. Francis County that would have returned

⁵P. R. Andrews to Robinson, April 5, 1911, Robinson Papers.

a verdict of guilty. No one in Forrest City expected anything worse for us than a hung jury, and almost everyone prophesied an acquittal. . . . I believe that if we can get another trial that we can acquit McAlister."⁶ S. H. Mann, Forrest City attorney and counsellor for the defense, felt that the jury was "intimidated by conditions surrounding the trial, fearing trouble should a verdict of not guilty be rendered."⁷

The defense attorneys began to study the trial for possible errors on which the Supreme Court of Arkansas might reverse the decision of the circuit court. Robinson recognized one mistake involving a prejudicial error by the court in allowing a state's witness to contradict a witness for the defense on a collateral matter.⁸ The Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Circuit Court on the technicality and ordered a retrial.

The case was retried in September, 1911, at Forrest City. This time Robinson was careful to choose the jury from urban rather than rural areas. His selection was so exacting that he approved only seven of the first 100 men examined for jury service. Fifty additional men were called before a jury was impaneled. This time McAlister was acquitted--just as

⁶Robinson to Charles A. Walls, April 14, 1911, ibid.

⁷S. H. Mann to Robinson, April 27, 1911, ibid.

⁸Robinson to P. R. Andrews, April 11, 1911, ibid.

Robinson had predicted.⁹

Will Ellis, indicted for manslaughter, was a client for whom Robinson attempted to hang a jury by entering a plea of insanity. As the trial progressed, his plea was so strong that it was difficult for the jury to remember that Ellis was being tried for a crime against society. His ingenious handling of factual data, his emotional appeal, and his references to religious and moral aspects are evidenced in the following excerpt:

All of the books and all of the witnesses tell us that heredity is a powerful factor in determining the question of sanity or insanity. The rule is well established that if one's antecedents, his parents or relatives, preceding him have developed unstable nervous organizations or have been afflicted with insanity in any of its many forms the tendency is for the child to inherit a predisposition toward insanity. Insanity itself as a disease of the brain is rarely inherited. It is the unstable nervous organization that is transmitted. Now, have you any doubt of that? Do not all of the witnesses concede its truth? A son born with the taint of hereditary insanity comes into the world, gentlemen, bearing a burden. If his days are spent in quietude and without disturbance, he may live in happiness and without manifestation of that horrible disease which transcends in its importance all other forms of disease. Let me disabuse your minds of any prejudice against a person who is tainted with hereditary insanity. . . . The causes which afflict him so antedate his birth. They are the consequences of ancestral instability and defect. He may struggle all he pleases, he may rise in the morning trembling with the fear of a shadow which he can not elude. He may sink to sleep at night haunted with the fear of a peril which he can not escape. . . . Men who have hearts of flesh will not disdain him. Against what fearful odds he struggles! Education can not remove it. Refinement can only conceal it. It matters not that you

⁹Forrest City Times (Arkansas), September 29, 1911, Robinson Clippings.

may not understand it. . . .¹⁰

Robinson lost the case, but he continued to fight for his client. He asked Governor Donaghey to pardon Ellis, offering to assume personally "responsibility in every respect for the act and defend it publicly whenever it might be challenged."¹¹ However, his efforts were unsuccessful.

Several personal injury claims against the Rock Island and the Missouri-Pacific railroads turned out more favorably. Because of the number of railroad suits handled, Robinson took an active part in the passage of "The Judiciary Revision Act" of 1911, which prevented a foreign corporation from removing from a state court any litigation involving a sum of less than \$3,000. This protected plaintiffs with limited funds by forbidding a change of venue to distant states.¹²

Robinson's relationship with the members of the law profession was friendly. Here is an example of the friendly banter often exchanged:

I am enclosing you herewith under separate cover a brief filed by Mr. H. H. Harrod and myself in the case of State vs. Frank Quertermous, in which we are trying to undo the devilment you did with your silver tongue. We charge you for advertising your great ability one-hundred dollars. You can send mine in garden seed,

¹⁰Newsclipping, n. d., ibid.

¹¹Robinson to J. F. Rutherford, December 31, 1909, Robinson Papers.

¹²Robinson to Trimble, July 23, 1912, ibid.

but Harrod, as usual, will demand the cool cash.¹³

Robinson replied:

Pursuant to your request I have forwarded a barrel of garden seed in compensation for your services in advertising as per page 18 of your brief and suggest to you that if you do not get a better line of business than the case in which you have filed this brief you had better close up your law office, move down into Lonoke County and engage in growing hay and cabbage.¹⁴

Until the fall of 1912 Robinson continued to be active in the firm of Trimble, Robinson and Trimble, but withdrew when he became governor of Arkansas and moved to Little Rock. Though Robinson and Judge Trimble had been partners for 15 years, only at that time did they feel it necessary to make a complete settlement of accounts.

When he left the governor's office, Robinson did not practice law for the six-year period from 1913 to the fall of 1919.¹⁵ He felt that his service in the Senate deserved his undivided attention. However, in 1918 he seriously considered an offer from a Chicago newspaper to become an editorial writer. This information reached President Wilson and prompted him to write an open letter requesting Robinson to stand for re-election as United States Senator from

¹³J. W. Blackwood to Robinson, April 8, 1910, ibid.

¹⁴Robinson to J. W. Blackwood, April 11, 1910, ibid.

¹⁵His brief service as governor is explained in detail in Chapter IV.

Arkansas.¹⁶

Senatorial activities added refinement to Robinson's speech, dignity to his appearance, and reserve in his elocution. These characteristics benefited him when he returned to legal practice with Charles T. Coleman, Joe W. House, and Joe W. House, Jr., under the firm name of Coleman, Robinson & House. This firm was dissolved in the fall of 1925; and in January, 1926, Robinson formed a limited partnership with Joe W. House, Jr., and C. Hamilton Moses under the firm name of Robinson, House & Moses.

Active law practice held several advantages for Robinson. His name added prominence and prestige to the firm. His offices in the Boyle Building furnished a place for his political headquarters in Little Rock and afforded him the opportunity to establish a clientele which he could serve upon retirement from the Senate. He found renewed pleasure in writing briefs. While he participated in only three or four cases a year, these required more factual data and more skill in presentation than had his earlier cases.

Robinson's largest fee came from the Federal case of W. M. Coats, et al. v. T. H. Barton, et al.¹⁷ This suit developed out of a dissolution of the partnership of W. M.

¹⁶Ray S. Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters (New York, 1939), VII, 530.

¹⁷Colonel T. H. Barton later became president of Arkansas' largest refinery, Lion Oil Refinery, El Dorado, Arkansas.

Coats, J. B. Sowell, and T. H. Barton who formed the El Dorado Natural Gas Company (capitalized at \$27,000) for the purpose of furnishing natural gas to oil operators in the newly developed oil pool of southern Arkansas. Each investor owned one-third of the stock. The growth of the business demanded an initial outlay of capital for expansion which was not available. At the request of the corporation, Barton went to New York City to seek additional funds and secured \$900,000 from a Mr. Lubell. However, the corporation found it increasingly difficult to meet the monthly payments on the loan. So El Dorado Natural Gas Company transferred its property to Natural Gas and Petroleum Corporation which declared capital assets of \$3,000,000. Natural Gas and Petroleum Corporation then announced \$1,500,000 of stock paid up and equally divided it among the three; the remaining \$1,500,000 was declared treasury stock. Barton unsuccessfully tried to sell this treasury stock in New York, Pittsburgh, and Chicago. General creditors were pressing, and demands of unpaid employees became more insistent.¹⁸ Business was decreasing and production was falling off each month.

In 1924 Barton sold his partners' interests to H. L. Doherty and Company for a cash settlement of \$115,000 each

¹⁸Opinion of Judge Frank A. Youmans, Federal Judge for Western District of Arkansas, El Dorado Division, Robinson Papers.

and retained for them a joint ownership in twenty acres of productive leases. He remained with the company and used the company stock as collateral to borrow \$500,000 from the H. L. Doherty and Company. With this loan he paid the company's debts, and used \$150,000 for current operating capital. Later, the property of the Natural Gas and Petroleum Corporation was transferred to a newly organized Natural Gas and Fuel Corporation. H. L. Doherty and Company held two-thirds of the stock and Barton the remaining one-third.

From the evidence, it was apparent that Coats and Sowell knew that they were selling out to Barton and that he would remain with the company. But as more production was found at greater depth on the leases in the El Dorado area and new fields were opened, the plaintiffs sought to bring suit in equity for restoration of ownership or payment of the difference on the ground that Barton and Doherty purchased their interests through collusion and fraud.

Robinson presented the oral argument at El Dorado, and District Judge Youmans held for the defendants and dismissed the case. Coats and Sowell appealed the case to Circuit Court of Appeals. Again Robinson defended Barton and Doherty at the hearing on June 14, 1927, and won the case.

Robinson set a tentative fee before the trial, but because of such successful prosecution he raised his fee. The \$60,000 paid his firm was entirely agreeable to the law

firm of Frueauff, Robinson & Sloan who represented the Doherty interests in New York. Robinson personally netted \$25,000 and used these funds to purchase the Foster house at 2122 Broadway, Little Rock, as his permanent residence.¹⁹

Robinson's last important case was the defense of A. B. Banks against the state of Arkansas in 1931. Banks had been a personal friend of Robinson for over thirty years; he had strongly supported Joe in his first race for Congress in 1902; and he had made substantial loans to Robinson during his campaign for governor in 1912. In addition Banks' son, Lawrence, had married a niece of Mrs. Robinson, Ethel Miller Banks.

A. B. Banks started a small loan business in Fordyce, Arkansas, and through his unusual financial ability built up three sizeable companies--The Home Life Insurance Company, The Home Fire Company, and The Home Accident Company. So strong was his belief that Arkansas bank stock was a sound investment that through his Board of Directors he used a large part of the assets of his three companies to purchase stock in forty-five state banks. He used these banks as a

¹⁹Robinson to Frueauff, Robinson and Sloan, January 19, 1927; Robinson to Robinson, House and Moses, February 2, 1927; Robinson to C. H. Moses, February 24, 1927; C. H. Moses to Robinson, February 11, 1927; Watson B. Robinson to Robinson, April 13, 1927; Robinson to Watson B. Robinson, April 18, 1927; Moses and House to Robinson, January 14, 1927, Robinson Papers; Coats v. Barton, 25 F2d 813 (8th Cir. 1928), brief for the appellees.

place of deposit and a source of substantial loans. In some instances his companies assumed doubtful assets of state banks in order to upgrade their holdings and improve their financial position. In the late 1920's A. B. Banks organized the largest financial institution in Arkansas by the consolidation of two Little Rock banks to form the American Exchange Trust Company. He did not personally direct the affairs of the bank, but did serve as chairman of the board of directors.

During the twenties, Arkansas experienced several financial reverses. Agricultural prices were low during most of the decade. In 1927 the Mississippi, Arkansas, and White rivers flooded large areas and destroyed much property. Then the stock market crash came in 1929, and then followed a severe drought in 1930.

In November, 1930, the American Exchange Trust Company experienced a "creeping run" which started about November 6, and by November 11, over \$1,000,000 in deposits had been withdrawn. This run may have been set off by the failure of Caldwell and Company which owned only \$62,500 of stock in the bank. On the night of November 14, clearing-house officials and outstanding bankers of Little Rock met with the officers of the bank. Representatives of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis and of the Chase National Bank of New York pledged a loan of \$1,000,000. No banker among the

entire group expressed a belief that the bank was not justified in opening on November 15, 1930.²⁰ On November 15, the withdrawals exceeded the deposits by approximately \$1,500,000. Since the bank had already lost over \$4,000,000 in withdrawals, the bank officials closed its doors to protect the loyal depositors, even though the cash reserve was still above the per cent required by law. The bank's action brought about the immediate closing on November 17 of the forty-five state banks that had advanced sizeable loans to the A. B. Banks enterprises. Public despair and suffering knew no bounds. Harry E. Meek wrote in the appellant's brief, "It was only human that the public should select A. B. Banks as the object of its vengeance. He was the logical scapegoat for an outraged people."²¹

Under the constant prodding of Prosecuting Attorney Carl E. Bailey, the grand jury of the First Chancery Court meeting in Little Rock returned an indictment against A. B. Banks under Section 31 of Act No. 113 of 1913. This act stated that it was a criminal offense for any officer or employee of a bank to accept deposits when it was known that the bank was insolvent or in a failing condition. Such an offense was punishable by imprisonment in the state peniten-

²⁰Banks v. State, 185 Ark. 539, 48 SW 2d 847, 82 ALR 1051 (1932), brief for appellant, 7.

²¹Ibid., 12.

tiary for not less than one year. Presumably, A. B. Banks was responsible for the tellers' acceptance of deposits on November 15, 1930, since he supposedly knew the American Exchange Trust Company was insolvent or failing at the time.

Carl E. Bailey, who later served two terms as governor, recognized the political advantages of prosecuting a case of this importance and attempted to prevent the grand jury from hearing further evidence after it had returned its indictment of Banks.²² However, after listening to additional testimony, sixteen members of the grand jury signed a report which requested the judge to dismiss the indictment against Banks on the basis of insufficient evidence.²³ The judge refused to reconsider the indictment.

Robinson believed that Banks had been indicted unjustly. He served as defense counsellor without pay and disregarded any possible effect upon his political standing. This decision to defend Banks brought strong protests from the people all over the state. One farmer wrote, "It may be good legal ethics for you to defend a banker who caused thousands of people to loose [sic] their money, but in my opinion, it is D--- poor politics. What do you think about it, Senator?"²⁴ At the trial Robinson served as chief

²²State v. Banks, 185 Ark. 539, court transcript, 69.

²³Ibid., 19.

²⁴Archie A. Anderson to Robinson, June 30, 1931, Robinson Papers.

counsellor; Henry Donham acted as chief advocate; and Harry E. Meek wrote the briefs on the appeal and on the motion for rehearing before the Supreme Court of Arkansas.

The conviction of A. B. Banks was largely based on circumstantial evidence. During the trial no witness testified to the value of the assets of the American Exchange Trust Company on the date of its closing, November 15, 1930; and no witness declared that the bank was insolvent on that date! Harry E. Meek pointed up this fact in his brief for the appellant: "The one important inquiry in this case, viz., the solvency or insolvency of the bank on November 15, 1930, was avoided by the prosecution as studiously as if the issue had been banned by a ruling of the court."²⁵ The state's witnesses based the evaluation of the bank's assets on a date six months after the closing of the bank. In several instances, this evaluation was unsupported by investigation. Robinson saw the weakness of the State's prosecution. He made sure that the testimony of the witnesses emphasized the fact that the bank was considered solvent on November 15, 1930.

The long trial lasted into the summer of 1931. A. B. Banks was found guilty and was sentenced to one year at hard labor in the state penitentiary. Unfavorable public opinion

²⁵Banks v. State, 185 Ark. 539, brief for appellant, 14.

toward Banks was said to have affected the decision of the jury and the review of his case by the Supreme Court of Arkansas.²⁶ Apparently, the verdict did not surprise Robinson because he recognized the presence of public sentiment and pressure against Banks.

Attorney Meek who prepared the brief for the appeal to the Supreme Court of Arkansas became so incensed over the verdict of the court that he purposely left the names of Robinson, House & Moses off the brief in case the court held him in contempt.

At the urging of Mrs. A. B. Banks, Robinson reluctantly agreed to give the oral argument. He felt that the brief ably presented the case and that the attention created by his oral argument might affect the case unfavorably. The hearing was set in April, 1932; and A. B. Banks remained out on bail in the meantime.

The Supreme Court affirmed the decision of the lower court. Robinson felt that the motion for a rehearing would prove futile and that the only relief for Mr. Banks, whose health had broken, was to secure a thirty-day furlough at once and later seek a pardon from Governor Harvey Parnell. He wrote to Henry Donham concerning the difficulty in securing any relief for Banks:

²⁶Interview, Harry E. Meek, Little Rock, August 27, 1953.

. . . it may be that the political situation, which from the beginning has made it impossible to secure fair consideration of the case, will make any immediate relief possible. Considering the merciless attitude of the public and the blind bitterness which was disclosed during the trial, if the same course was taken in other cases literally hundreds of the best men in Arkansas, who seem to be getting by would be subjected to penalties.²⁷

On the date set for A. B. Banks to begin his prison term, he and Mrs. Banks arrived at the sheriff's office in Little Rock. That very day, Governor Parnell issued a reprieve for Banks, and Harry Meek presented it to the county sheriff. But Sheriff Blake Williams refused to recognize it and called Prosecutor Carl Bailey, who instructed him to ignore it. Then Meek rushed down to the office of Judge Harris to secure a writ of habeas corpus. Everyone seemed excited except Governor Parnell who upon learning of Williams' action, telephoned the warden at the state penitentiary and directed him to refuse the admittance or custody of Banks. Sheriff Williams arrived with his charge, but released him upon the refusal of the warden to admit him. Later, Governor Parnell issued a pardon due largely to Robinson's insistence.²⁸

Through the years Robinson maintained a limited partnership agreement with Joe W. House and C. Hamilton Moses under which he received fees only for cases he personally

²⁷Robinson to Henry Donham, April 18, 1932, Robinson Papers.

²⁸Interview, Harry E. Meek, Little Rock, Arkansas, September 2, 1954.

accepted. Moses handled legal matters for Harvey C. Couch and his power interests.²⁹ Though Robinson took no part in these cases, he was severely criticized in the Senate race of 1930. Tom Campbell, the opposition candidate, alleged that Senator Robinson was legal counsel for large corporations. Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma even went so far as to have printed in the Congressional Record in the spring of 1932 a speech by Mr. Simpson of the Farmers Union condemning the people of Arkansas for re-electing Robinson to the Senate although aware of his alleged association with corporations and power companies.

Senator Huey P. Long of Louisiana also attacked Robinson on April 29, 1932, by challenging his leadership and by resigning from his committee assignments.³⁰ Later, on May 12, Long delivered an hour-long tirade in which he implied that Robinson represented the rich and was unsympathetic toward the poor. He stated that Robinson's connection with corporate interests made him unacceptable as Democratic leader, and as evidence of such connection read a list from Martindale's Legal Directory of forty-three firms represented by Robinson, House & Moses, including utilities, banks, rail-

²⁹Robinson to C. H. Moses, January 18, 1928, Robinson Papers.

³⁰Congressional Record, 72 Cong., 1 sess., April 29, 1932, p. 9214. Hereafter cited as Cong. Rec.

roads, insurance companies, oil firms, hotels, and other businesses.³¹ Robinson refused to give stature to Long's allegation by discussing it, but he now realized that in some instances his position might be questionable.³² His reason for retaining his law partnership had been to plan for the time when he should retire from public life, but shortly after Long's attack he withdrew from the firm.³³

Robinson had certain legal principles which he observed throughout his career. He never accepted a fee for rendering a service relating to any proceeding before any Federal department or commission.³⁴ As a senator he never engaged in any civil case to which the United States was a party. He regarded it as unethical for a member of Congress to participate in a lawsuit involving the government if it appeared that the subject matter of the litigation would come before the Congress for legislation.³⁵

Once Robinson was offered a fee to use his influence in securing a pardon from Governor Donaghey. He answered, "In no event would I think about charging or receiving either

³¹Ibid., May 12, 1932, p. 10062.

³²Robinson to House and Moses, May 6, 1932, Robinson Papers.

³³Robinson to Edward J. Guilfoil, May 6, 1932, ibid.

³⁴Robinson to House, November 17, 1919, ibid.

³⁵Robinson to Sam G. Bratton, January 9, 1925, telegram, ibid.

directly or indirectly anything for such services as I might render. I have never accepted a fee in such matters, and have some very pointed convictions on that subject."³⁶

His income from his law practice was never impressive. In the sixteen years from 1921 to 1936, he received approximately \$106,000 in fees, which varied from a low of \$750 in 1921 to a high of \$25,000 in 1927.³⁷ His law practice provided the necessary additional income for him to live comfortably but modestly and enabled him to meet his social obligations as the Democratic Senate Leader.

In 1935, Joseph E. Davies offered Robinson a salary of \$50,000 a year to join his Washington law firm at the end of his current Senate term. Robinson considered the offer but could not resist the plea of business and political leaders who urged him to run for re-election in 1936.

Robinson did not accumulate much wealth. He increased his land holdings from about 200 acres before 1900 to over 1500 acres in 1909.³⁸ He made these purchases at tax sales, bought unimproved land at a minimum price, and also accepted land in payment of legal fees. He often borrowed money to expand his land holdings from the Central

³⁶Robinson to J. D. Mathis, July 14, 1911, ibid.

³⁷This information was taken from Robinson's Federal Income Tax returns from 1921 to 1936, ibid.

³⁸These facts were taken from his Lonoke and Prairie County tax receipts from 1896 to 1936, ibid.

Bank of Arkansas and the Lonoke County Bank.³⁹ He had small holdings in Texas, Oklahoma, and Colorado, and city lots in Lonoke and Little Rock.

Robinson had little success in sharecropping with tenants. His presence was required in Washington when the crops needed the closest attention. He left the sale of supplies to a home merchant,⁴⁰ usually McCrary and Company or Joe P. Eagle and the supervision of the crops to Mrs. Robinson, Jesse Miller, or Grady Miller.⁴¹ Early in the spring of 1910 he wrote his father-in-law detailed instructions as to the supervision of his lands:

The very first day possible see to the ditches and fences on the Jones place, and have the ground laid off in rows four feet apart and have it bedded very carefully. Open the beds and plant in corn and do not let them botch it. As to the Vassar land, have that grubbed and broken if it has not already been done, and sow about five acres of it in oats. The remainder we will sow in peas. This land ought to have been broken early in the winter so that the turf could have rotted, but a good disc harrow run over it a time or two after it has been turned ought to put it in fair shape.⁴²

He knew a great deal about farming but was unsuccessful in his dealings with sharecroppers and renters. Sometimes he lost the entire amount furnished to his tenants

³⁹W. H. Young to Robinson, November, 1910; W. T. Couch to Robinson, November 28, 1910, ibid.

⁴⁰Robinson to Joe P. Eagle, May 11, 1910, ibid.

⁴¹Robinson to Jesse Miller, March 1, 1910, ibid.

⁴²Robinson to McCrary and Co., April 4, 1910, ibid.

during a crop year. Rent returns never exceeded \$900 a year, and after 1932 showed a deficit.⁴³

Robinson was able to augment his income by fees received for speaking engagements. He wrote Grady Miller that he hoped to make about \$5,000 from summer Chautauqua tours in 1913 to clear some of his debts of the previous campaign year. Later he was booked by the Thomas Speaking Bureau and received an honorarium from \$250 to \$500 for each speech. Robinson wrote some articles for the magazine section of the New York Times and was paid a salary of \$1,000 per year for two years.⁴⁴

The only other business venture that Robinson engaged in was a partnership with Grady Miller for the Oakland car agency. In order to gain volume sales in 1912, they decided to shave their commissions on the sale of the new cars. They hoped by this method they would gain wider distribution and at least clear the cost of their own cars.⁴⁵ After a short period the agency was disbanded.

Robinson did not have the necessary time to develop successful enterprises and probably did not have the business acumen to make a success even if he had had the time.

⁴³Income tax returns, ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Robinson to Grady Miller, December 10, 1912, ibid.

His real ability lay in the practice of law, in which he might have been eminently successful financially had he devoted his entire attention to it.

CHAPTER III

REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE SIXTH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Robinson's experience in the state legislature inspired him to seek higher political office. As early as 1898 he secretly told his close friend, Isaac McClellan, that he was thinking seriously about running against Stephen S. Brundidge, incumbent from the Second Congressional District, for the U. S. Representative. When the Twelfth Census Report disclosed that Arkansas was entitled to additional representation, Brundidge used his influence in drafting the redistricting act to exclude Robinson's home county of Lonoke from the revamped Second Congressional District.

The Sixth District, composed of twelve counties, included the lower flood plains of the White and Arkansas Rivers, the bottom lands along the Ouachita and Saline Rivers, and the mountainous regions in Hot Springs, Saline, and Garland Counties. This new district consisted of farming communities with a number of saw mills and lumber companies scattered throughout the heavy virgin pine and hardwood forests. Pine Bluff, a small industrial center and

division point for the Cotton Belt Railroad, and Hot Springs, a lively resort and health center, were the only two county seats of any size. The sparsely settled country and Robinson's unfamiliarity with the new Sixth District made campaigning an arduous and time-consuming task.

But in July, 1901, Robinson started his political activity for the Congressional post in preparation for the Democratic primary in March, 1902. He addressed campaign letters in October, 1901, to the constituents of his district, stating that he supported the abolition of trusts, the suppression of anarchy, a tariff for revenue only, and the construction and maintenance of a safe system of levees. In the course of the campaign he urged the repeal of the war revenue act, the exclusion of Chinese immigration and other cheap labor, the endorsement of the Monroe Doctrine, the offer of the good offices of the United States to aid in the settlement of the conflict between Great Britain and the South African republics, and the defeat of the Hanna-Payne ship subsidy bill.¹

His opponent, Sam M. Taylor of Pine Bluff, an active member of the Democratic party for fifteen years, had served as a convention delegate to Chicago in 1896 and Kansas City in 1900 and as temporary chairman of the state Democratic

¹Robinson campaign letter: "To the Citizens of the New Sixth Congressional District of Arkansas," October, 1901, Robinson Papers.

convention of 1896. From 1892 he had been prosecuting attorney of a judicial district embracing five of the twelve counties of the newly formed Sixth Congressional District. As a member of the successful law firm of Taylor and Austin, he was held in high regard by the community and had been president of the Pine Bluff school board for the past seven years. The Pine Bluff Courier paid tribute to Colonel Taylor as "one of Jefferson County's best beloved citizens" who "by reason of his prominence at the bar is one of the most favorably known men in the state."²

Robinson and Taylor frequently engaged in joint debate, traveling together on their speaking tours. Their custom was for each to address the audience and then speak fifteen minutes in rebuttal. Their campaign methods furnished interesting contrasts. Taylor remained in town handshaking and passing out political cards at the local livery stable. Robinson arose early, spent his mornings visiting with nearby farmers, and returned to talk with the merchants in the afternoons. Taylor was unaware of these tactics until after the campaign. Robinson once stated that there were no issues present between Taylor and himself, but that his name would look better unscratched than that of Sam M. Taylor. The Benton Democrat of March 13, 1902, felt that "no vital

²Pine Bluff Courier (Arkansas), January 12, 1902, Robinson Clippings.

issues" existed. Robinson, however, struck some telling blows at Taylor's employment as a railroad attorney, and the editor of the Times Journal (Malvern) agreed, ". . . but inasmuch as Colonel Taylor has for many years been one of the attorneys for the Iron Mountain Railroad Company and is now one of their attorneys . . . it would seem that the best interests of the general public demand the election of Mr. Robinson. Not that a lawyer should be denied the privilege of representing any client who may seek his services, but in this campaign the issues are for your congressman one whose professional relations could in no wise conflict with his official duties."³

Definitely the odds were against Robinson. Since most of his campaign speeches in 1898 and 1900 had been made in the Second District, he had spoken in only two or three of the twelve counties. He was so determined to make himself known throughout the district that he engaged in an extensive campaign lasting nine months. He secured the support of some of the best-known politicians in the state. Jeff Davis, candidate for governor in 1902, exercised his powerful influence among the rural people in Robinson's behalf. Robinson's relatives rallied to his cause, including ex-governor James P. Eagle, who sent a circular letter to all Baptists.

³Times Journal (Malvern, Arkansas), March 19, 1902, ibid.

Robinson's instructions to his district workers demanded an exactness of conduct. He asked them to campaign quietly and cast no reflections upon the character of his opponent. They were to continue the canvass on election day and to watch the polling places until they were closed. They were to deny any injurious rumors and to divulge to no one the strength or weakness of any locality.

In this campaign, as in all, a major factor in Robinson's success was his wife, Ewilda. Though she had not wished him to enter politics, believing his talents lay in the practice of law, once he had made his decision she was the essence of loyalty and devotion. Her acute political sense made her advice invaluable; her economies contributed to the repayment of loans caused by heavy campaign expenditures. Her calmness soothed his fiery outbursts of anger. In this campaign she sent her letters ahead to greet him at each stop. She wrote:

Tell me, how are you getting along in your campaign? You have a great battle before you, and it will take lots of hard work. Wish it were proper for ladies to campaign, I certainly would enter the field. Maybe I could do a little bit of good for you. . . .⁴

The Chronicle Enterprise noted that the St. Louis and Iron Mountain Railroad (Missouri-Pacific) was a part of the Gould system which had "exercised a powerful influence"

⁴Mrs. Robinson to Robinson, January, 1902, Robinson Papers.

in defeating legislation designed to protect the people.⁵ Robinson took advantage of this reaction and had printed on his political cards: "Vote for Joe T. Robinson for Congress. Never served a railroad corporation; always serves the people."

Many newspapers complimented Robinson. The DeWitt New Era praised him as one of the brightest young men in Arkansas; the Cabot Guard called him "the finest orator in the state"; the Searcy Beacon described him as "the brainy young statesman of Lonoke"; and the Drew County Advance pictured him as the "brilliant young congressional aspirant." The Times Journal of Hot Springs County said, "By close study and application he has made himself one of the state's best lawyers and is recognized as an orator of great ability." The Cleveland County Herald agreed that "those who have heard him speak say that as an orator he has but few equals in the state." His home paper, the Lonoke Weekly Democrat, consistently supported him.⁶

In the primary on March 29, 1902, Robinson carried eight of the twelve counties; at the congressional convention in Fordyce, July 4, he had forty-nine instructed votes to Taylor's nineteen. He carried every township in some counties

⁵Chronicle Enterprise (Fordyce, Arkansas), February 20, 1902, Robinson Clippings.

⁶Lonoke Weekly Democrat (Arkansas), January 10, 1902.

and doubled Taylor's vote in others.

Analyzing his successful campaign, the Lonoke Weekly Democrat said:

Mr. Robinson has the happy tact of coming close in touch with the people, and his great ability and character impress itself upon them and cause them to feel that their interests are in safe hands and closely guarded with him as their representative.⁷

The Stuttgart Republican made a prophetic prediction in its detailed analysis:

Naturally, logically, geographically, and in age and experience, Col. Sam Taylor was the man, and up to a few weeks ago it was the general supposition that he would win. But Joe Robinson, the young man from Lonoke, the beardless kid in comparison, poor in purse but full of the persimmon juice of the native brand and the vinegar of hopeful audacity, put up a fight that has astonished everybody. . . . The gallant Joe Robinson has won most triumphantly. . . . We predict for him a brilliant career at Washington--a long one in fact--and shall watch his conduct politically with the interest of a friend.⁸

Robinson's Fourth of July acceptance speech of the Democratic nomination at Fordyce was a combination attack on the Republican policy toward the Philippine Islands and the tariff, denunciation of trusts in general, and a patriotic outburst in recognition of Independence Day. His closing words aided in removing the sting of defeat and gained the future friendship of Colonel Taylor:

⁷Ibid., April 10, 1902.

⁸The Republican (Stuttgart, Arkansas), July 5, 1902, Robinson Clippings.

I honor the gallant gentleman [Sam M. Taylor] who so nobly and manfully contended for the distinction which it is my happy lot to enjoy. Whatever may befall me in the years to come I shall remember and respect him as an antagonist who never fought from ambush but made his battle in the open field; I shall love him as a friend whose fortitude and manliness, whose knightly courtesy remained untarnished in the hour of his defeat.⁹

Robinson was never again confronted with any effective opposition in this district and polled such an overwhelming vote that no real contest ever reoccurred. He kept his constituents loyal by his excellent representation of their interests in Congress. In addition he mailed them garden and flower seed, and spoke regularly at their county picnics.

At a special session of Congress Robinson took his seat on November 9, 1903. His maiden speech supported an appropriation of \$250,000 for the extermination of the boll weevil throughout the cotton-raising south. His support of this measure prompted his appointment to the agriculture delegation from the cotton states that interviewed President Roosevelt and Secretary Wilson of the Department of Agriculture. The efforts of this committee were largely responsible for the successful passage of the appropriation. Robinson continually reminded his audiences that farmers were receiving low prices. He believed these prices were determined not by the natural law of supply and demand, but were fixed

⁹Speech before the Sixth Congressional District Convention, Fordyce, Arkansas, July 4, 1902, Robinson Papers.

by the American trusts.¹⁰

Robinson vehemently denounced gambling in agricultural futures and wholeheartedly supported the Scott Anti-Futures Bill which would make it unlawful for any person to send any message offering to sell or buy cotton without intending that such cotton be actually delivered. He believed this practice caused fluctuations in prices and unstable markets, and that only government regulation could prevent such transactions. He pictures the unequal struggle between the dirt farmer and the professional commodity speculator:

He who buys or sells a product with no intention of receiving or delivering it is in every sense a gambler, and his act of buying and selling on margins, products not intended for actual delivery, has every characteristic of a game of chance. He bets for or against the elements, the fertility of fields and farms, the diligence, the energy, the good luck, the success, or failure of those who give to actual production their strength and labor and who consecrate their lives to toil.¹¹

Robinson also upbraided the Senate for its indifference to the farmer in burying the Scott bill in the agricultural committee. He said, "Deep in some dusty pigeonhole it lies, food for the ever-fattening microbes of favored interests and special privileges that prosper and shield themselves while they undermine the towers of liberty and assail

¹⁰Speech before the Farmer's Union, Hot Springs, Arkansas, July 4, 1907, ibid.

¹¹Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 3 sess., February 2, 1911, p. 1864.

the foundations of equality."¹²

The President of the Farmers Educational and Cooperative Union introduced Robinson as the most effective friend the union had in Congress because he aided the farm lobbyists by personally securing pledges from at least fifty members of Congress. However, the Scott bill was never passed.

The anti-cotton futures bill could not be put aside so easily. In the 62nd Congress, Jack Beall of Texas introduced a bill similar to the Scott Bill which forbade the sending of cotton quotations by telegraph, telephone, cable, or other means from the United States to foreign countries. Representative H. Garland Dupre of Louisiana predicted that the effect of this bill would be a "worse blow to the cotton industry than even the boll weevil which had devastated the country. The cotton exchanges would be destroyed." He added that if the New Orleans Exchange, which had been the best friend of the southern farmer, were destroyed, King Cotton would become the vassal of Liverpool.

Robinson supported the measure because cotton transactions would be limited to bona fide sales and purchases of the actual commodity. Further, the market would fluctuate less if subject to the laws of supply and demand and not to the sale of enormous quantities of fictitious cotton. "The demand for this legislation," he said, "primarily comes from

¹²Ibid., 1865.

the workers--the farmers and the spinners. Opposition comes only from the exchanges. My voice and my vote are with the workers."¹³

During the years as Representative, Robinson repeatedly introduced two bills that had their antecedents in the Civil War and the Reconstruction period. The first of these was an internal tax of \$15.00 per bale of cotton. Although the Supreme Court shortly declared the act unconstitutional, some money had been collected. Robinson proposed to restore the funds thus collected to the original payees of the tax or to their heirs, and to set aside for the common schools of each state all funds not disbursed on private claims. Arkansas would receive approximately \$5,000,000. The other bill proposed the creation of a Civil War Claims Commission with authority to adjudicate claims against the United States for property taken from loyal citizens and used by Federal soldiers, and for property of religious and charitable institutions destroyed by Federal troops during the Civil War. He was unsuccessful in obtaining passage of either measure.

Robinson was largely responsible for the establishment of rice experimental stations at Stuttgart and Lonoke. After the first successful ventures in 1906, rice quickly became one of the basic crops in the Lonoke area.¹⁴

¹³Ibid., 62 Cong., 2 sess., July 16, 1912, p. 9149.

¹⁴Chester G. Haskell to Robinson, November 27, 1910, Robinson Papers.

On such issues as postal-savings banks, centralized banking, immigration and parcel post legislation, Robinson reflected accurately the general attitude of the farm population in Arkansas and of rural America. Small state bankers wrote personal letters to him asking him to oppose the postal-savings bank bill on the ground that this would bring government competition in the savings department.¹⁵ Robinson's response was that he thought the competition would be negligible and that the bill would encourage savings in general without draining the area of its money.

Toward centralized federal control of banking Robinson's attitude was Jacksonian pure and simple:

The opposition of the American farmer to the establishment of a central bank of issue grows out of the Democratic idea . . . that such a bank would become the most powerful and oppressive monopoly that has existed in our country. It would, of necessity, exercise a financial power that would enable it to depress or increase the price of products by increasing or calling in its notes. I have not the slightest doubt that it would tend to strengthen the financial condition of the United States and to make our credit more stable with foreign powers; but I believe the evils which would result from its establishment would more than counterbalance any good its establishment can promise.¹⁶

In opposing centralized federal control, Robinson discussed a possible method of restoring confidence of depositors in banks. He proposed that the federal government

¹⁵J. E. Boyce to Robinson, February 14, 1910, ibid.

¹⁶Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 3 sess., February 2, 1911, p. 1865.

guarantee all deposits in national banks and require the banks to reimburse the government; further, the proposal called for a tax on the banks which would provide a fund sufficient to secure all losses and thus prevent runs. Such legislation, he believed, would curtail the financial power of eastern bankers and prevent activities that had produced the panic of 1907.¹⁷

Robinson consistently stood for more stringent restrictions on immigration. His views coincided with those of the farm organizations which urged Congress to adopt a bill requiring all immigrants, age sixteen or over, to pass a comprehensive literacy test. By this means he wished to exclude one-half of the annual migration from southeastern Europe. He claimed that many of them had strong criminal tendencies and were "antagonistic by birth and training to the institutions of liberty and enlightenment which are the pride of all loyal Americans." Opposition to such a bill, he stated, came only from selfish interests who made money by transporting immigrants.

Robinson expressed his attitude toward Japanese immigrants and race relations in the South by a denunciation of President Roosevelt's threat to use the army and navy to compel California to admit Japanese students to white public

¹⁷Speech, "The Teachings of Jefferson Applied to Present Political Problems," Young Men's Democratic Club, Garland County, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 1908, Robinson Papers.

schools.

This treaty . . . did not and could not impose upon the people of San Francisco the obligation of opening their public schools to alien races. Public schools are provided for and maintained under state laws and the National Government has no power of interference or control over them. . . . The President had no more right to force the admission of Japanese students to the schools of San Francisco than he would have to prize open the doors of School Houses in the South and compel white boys and girls to sit at desks along-side negro children.¹⁸

Robinson supported the farmers who protested the exorbitant rates of the express companies and petitioned Congress to establish a parcel-post mail service. He felt this service would equalize prices and make the merchandise of larger marketing centers available to local communities. He thought the threat to the local retail merchants was "greatly magnified and exaggerated," and cited the success of such a system in Europe. Little did he know that this act opened the way for the growth of such firms as Montgomery Ward, Sears and Roebuck, Butler Brothers, and Spiegels.

Robinson summed up his efforts in behalf of the farmers by saying that he had never voted against their wishes or interests. He continued: "A close inspection of my entire record will convince anyone that whenever the opportunity has arisen I have sought to further the interest of agriculture."¹⁹

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹F. M. Talston to Robinson, February 21, 1910, Robinson Papers.

The powerful railroad interests and the American trusts were often the target of Robinson's attacks. On February 28, 1905, he reprimanded the Republicans for their failure to support the Townsend-Esch Bill which would have enabled the Interstate Commerce Commission to fix reasonable rates and to prevent rate discrimination. The bill passed the House but was buried in the Senate, despite President Theodore Roosevelt's support.

Private freight cars, which were not restrained under the Interstate Commerce Commission became important factors in the transportation of freight in the United States. By devious methods corporations owning such transportation monopolized certain businesses and their commodities, and of course, they screamed "government ownership" when any attempt was made to exercise control. A chief offender, the beef trust, acquired unparalleled power over the fortunes and lives of the people by shipping perishable products from the stockyard, farm, and slaughterhouse across the country, under unwholesome conditions. Their recognized superiority over common freight cars enabled them to monopolize the shipment of meats, fruits, and vegetables.

Early in 1900, Armour, Swift, Morris, and Hammond joined forces and either bought out or crushed seventy-five per cent of the competitors with the result that 42,000 of the 55,000 refrigerator cars in use were owned by these

packers. Everybody's Magazine made the statement that the beef trust was more powerful than Standard Oil and Wall Street combined, and that it forced the small shippers and indirectly the consumers to rebate \$25,000,000.

Robinson was appalled that the food products of the American table were subjected to price fixing of this nature. He demanded to know why a corporation, created by state and federal law, was permitted to oppress its creator. He agreed with Representative William P. Hepburn of Iowa that government ownership would result from such a continued oppression of the people and that the only way to avoid such action would be for the private car corporations to offer their services to all users on equal terms.

The duty of Congress seemed plain to Robinson. He asked the House to discharge its duty by restraining through proper legislation this mad commercial combination that was deriding laws and rights and constitutions as if they were playthings and asserted, "Every age has its issues. The great issue at this time is how shall personal liberty be secured against the encroachments of combined wealth and power?"²⁰

Robinson did not fear the probable results of his attack upon the beef trust; he called all brave men to the front. The fight was just beginning. He said, "The people

²⁰Cong. Rec., 58 Cong., 3 sess., February 28, 1905, pp. 3703-05.

are right, and their cause is just. It will prevail."²¹
The press applauded Robinson's arraignment of the beef trust as one of the ablest ever heard in the House. Although the bill met defeat at this time, the way was paved for the Hepburn Act in 1906 and other corrective acts that followed.

Several measures pertaining to railroad regulations were introduced in the House by Robinson. One bill authorized and directed the Interstate Commerce Commission to ascertain the total value of every railroad engaged in interstate commerce; another bill permitted shippers to route merchandise as they wished but could charge only the lowest published rate between points of origin and destination; a third bill required carriers of interstate commerce to pay interest on deferred payment of claims;²² a fourth bill required the inspection of locomotive boilers for trains operating in interstate commerce. He said, "I have not the slightest doubt that the systematic inspection of boilers on locomotives will in a very short time reduce to a minimum accidents arising from defective boilers."²³

From 1905 to 1912 Representative Robinson was a member of the Committee on Public Lands, and served as its

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 60 Cong., 1 sess., December 2, 1907, p. 13.

²³Ibid., 61 Cong., 3 sess., February 7, 1911, p. 2072.

chairman during the 62nd Congress. His position enabled him to push through many beneficial bills dealing with the public lands of the Hot Springs Reservation.

In 1908 Robinson reprimanded the Roosevelt administration for allowing the railroad interests in Oregon to sell their land grants to corporations rather than to actual settlers. The failure of the Harriman railroad interests to comply with the terms of the grant seemed reasonable grounds for the forfeiture of 3,000,000 acres granted them in Oregon. Land patents issued by the railroads should be investigated, Robinson felt; otherwise, the integrity of the United States would be undermined, the position of the courts impaired, and the public land lost to the greedy spoiler. This amendment to prevent investigation of passage of title was overwhelmingly defeated.²⁴

The public land laws, Robinson felt, needed revision to prevent gross abuse of coal and agricultural land reserves. He proposed the codification of public land acts to protect the homesteader and to prevent the indiscriminate withdrawal of public lands by President Taft. In 1910, the public land committee supported a new policy of granting the surface land to agriculturalists and the subsurface rights to the mining industry.²⁵

²⁴Ibid., 60 Cong., 2 sess., April 23, 1908, pp. 5123-24.

²⁵Ibid., 61 Cong., 2 sess., April 13, 1910, p. 4624.

While Robinson urged the protection and retention of millions of acres that were held in western forest and coal reserves, Representative Edward Taylor berated the South and East for their views on conservation. He asked, "How long shall we have to endure these stupid, eastern, theoretical, so-called conservation ideas that prohibit the growth and development of our own country?"²⁶

The public lands bill reported by Chairman Frank W. Mondell and his committee permitted the depletion of coal and agricultural land reserves. Robinson fought this measure at every turn and predicted the fate of these valuable lands. He prophesied:

. . . instead of conserving to the government and to future generation, valuable coal deposits . . . this very bill itself . . . authorizes the agricultural entry to the surface of coal lands and does not guard against frauds or combinations, [and] it is possible most of the lands will go into the hands of coal barons, and by that means they will be able to further monopolize the coal industry.²⁷

The development of Alaska held a strange fascination for Robinson. He wanted to open its coal fields and construct wharves for the re-coaling of naval vessels. Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt endorsed a Robinson bill authorizing the construction and operation of a government railroad from

²⁶Ibid., 6157.

²⁷Ibid., 6044.

Seward to Fairbanks.²⁸ Robinson's interest in Alaskan affairs was rewarded by his appointment to membership on the Alaskan Commission.²⁹

The greatest achievement of his congressional career was his contribution to the development of a broad, general policy toward drainage of swamp, wet, and overflowed lands in the lower Mississippi valley. In November, 1907, Robinson addressed the National Drainage Association in Baltimore on the need for close cooperation between local agencies and the federal government in the development of an adequate drainage system.

Two kinds of national legislation relating to drainage were under consideration by Congress. One provided for investigations, surveys, estimates, and benefits of proposed projects. A second inaugurated a construction and repayment system. In an address before the House, Robinson upheld the legality of such legislation and asked why it was constitutional for the government to assist and encourage the placing of water upon arid land and unconstitutional to assist and encourage the removal of water from wet or overflowed lands.³⁰

Through the years Robinson worked diligently on

²⁸Theodore Roosevelt, "Alaska Again," Outlook, XCVIII (August 12, 1911), 821-23.

²⁹Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 3 sess., March 4, 1911, p. 4334.

³⁰Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), November 28, 1907.

drainage legislation. Between 1907 and 1912 he introduced five bills and sponsored amendments to some irrigation bills by seeking appropriations for the reclamation of swamp lands.³¹ In 1911, by clever strategy, he was successful in securing \$100,000 for drainage investigation. He made a nationalistic appeal that may have partially aided in securing its approval:

Its adoption will result in practical benefit. You of the West, who enjoy the results of the wonderful system of irrigation which had reclaimed millions of acres of desert and semi-arid land, should sympathize with this movement to reclaim the swamp land in other sections; for it is certainly true the movement, viewed from the standpoint of area to be affected and of results to be accomplished, is not less important than that of irrigation, which has accomplished so much for the West.³²

Robinson looked forward to the day when the federal government would assume supervision and control of the entire Mississippi River levee system. His greatest contributions came later in his senatorial career, but even now he probably ranked next to Joseph E. Ransdell of Louisiana as the best informed member of the House on drainage legislation.

Robinson vigorously supported the Sixteenth Amendment. He delivered one of his most descriptive speeches in support of the Bailey-Cummins income tax amendment for he believed it to be a "fair and just method of taxation." Since

³¹Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 2 sess., June 21, 1910, p. 8698.

³²Ibid., 61 Cong., 3 sess., February 10, 1911, p. 2314.

the members of the American Bar Association had given very little support to the opinion handed down by the Supreme Court on the Pollock v. Loan Company (157 US 429) in 1895, and since the attitude of the court had changed during these 14 years, Robinson believed that if a new income tax law were passed the court would reverse itself and sanction the tax. Then, he described American politics in a striking simile which was grandiloquent in its construction and was remembered for many years:

The sea of American political controversy is never in perfect calm. Its bosom is always disturbed by whirlpools and tossed by tempests. Sometimes its surface is lurid with many lights that dance and gleam and dazzle, then vanish from the political mariner's sight. The shores of the political sea are strewn with ghastly corpses of hopes thrown overboard and washed ashore. Along the beach lie scattered shattered hulls and broken beams. Its bottoms hold in close embrace rich cargoes of unrealized ambitions.

Mr. Speaker, the Republican Party today is at sea in a floundering ship, tempest tossed, its sails torn and its masts broken, with blind or drunken helmsmen at the wheel. It is making for any old port of the political sea, whether there is a harbor or not. It will appropriate the political thunder of William J. Bryan, whom it has denounced as an anarchist, and then solemnly come before the American Congress and ask the members here to support his ideas. There are men in this Chamber who owe William J. Bryan an apology. It is not my province or duty to deliver them a lecture, but I say to you that if I had denounced a man as an anarchist, as you did, Mr. Speaker, in 1896; if I had gone into my state and cried out against seating in the President's chair an anarchist; if I and my party against my will, had been driven by public opinion to adopt his ideas, I would take off my hat to him and say, "William, you are not so bad a man as I dreamed you were. I am the bad man myself."³³

³³Conq. Rec., 61 Cong., 1 sess., July 12, 1909, p. 4429.

Closing his speech with a barb for the slow and dragging effort of the House of Representatives who seldom did anything until it felt the lash of public opinion, he took his seat amid the applause of the Democratic side. Representative Ralph Dayton Cole of Ohio (a Republican) complimented Robinson's "magnificent appearance" upon the floor and his "very emphatic and effective method of delivery." He observed, "He has certainly given us an exposition of the Democratic side of this question that will stand long in history as an unparalleled example of classic political literature."³⁴

Direct election of senators had become a popular issue by 1911 and House members spoke favorably on the amendment just for the record. On April 13 Robinson gave his reasons why the Seventeenth Amendment should be adopted: it would increase the power of the people; the direct election of the senators would make the legislative branch responsive to the public; deadlocks that had occurred in past legislatures over the selection of a senator would be eliminated; and the direct election method would free the selection from the "shameful and disgraceful practices" of bribery and corruption that frequently occurred in the state legislatures.³⁵

Traditionally, Robinson favored the Democratic low tariff policy, but was not anxious to see his section of the

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 62 Cong., 1 sess., April 13, 1911, p. 220.

country suffer from tariff revision.³⁶ He felt that the American paper trust had supporters in Congress that throttled any attempt to repeal the duty on wood pulp and printing paper supplies.³⁷ During the debate on the Payne-Aldrich Tariff Act of 1909, southern yellow pine lumbermen and hardwood forest processors peppered Robinson with requests for protection from Canadian lumber importations.³⁸ The President of Cotton Belt Savings and Trust Company at Pine Bluff reflected this new view on industrial development in the South:

. . . People of the South . . . having largely held the views of their party [Democratic] on the tariff question . . . are beginning to feel that if protection is to be passed around, it is no more than right that they should have a little of it as it goes. The lumber industry in our section is the one that would perhaps be most affected by the tariff changes, and considering the low ebb at which the business has been for the past year, and the numerous failures and almost utter inability of the small men in the business to operate at all, it is evident to my mind that any decrease in the tariff on lumber would result very disastrously to our lumber men, and the communities that depend on this industry for their prosperity.³⁹

In a general debate on July 12, 1909, Robinson reprimanded the Republicans for their failure to reduce the tariff and

³⁶Robinson to J. E. Boyce, February 18, 1909, Robinson Papers.

³⁷Cong. Rec., 60 Cong., 1 sess., December 2, 1907, p. 15. Quoted in Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), April 27, 1908.

³⁸G. E. Mattson to Robinson, February 4, 1909, Robinson Papers.

³⁹J. E. Boyce to Robinson, February 15, 1909, ibid.

declared that they were "deliberately trying to fool the American people." Tariff decreases related to trivial items little used, but the principal increases covered everyday food and clothing. Robinson supported a tariff reduction on sugar and an increase of two cents a pound on imported rice.⁴⁰

Throughout his Congressional career, Robinson consistently denounced graft, corruption, excessive campaign expenditures, and partisan legislation. The corruption in the post office department was his particular peeve. In an address at Boston, 1905, he asked Senator Orville H. Platt to help purify American politics by supporting his resolution to limit campaign expenditures.⁴¹ His suggestion to investigate corporation contributions to the 1904 national campaign funds brought hearty approval of his Democratic colleagues. Champ Clark commented: "I feel absolutely certain that all honest men who read Robinson's scorching, blistering words will feel that he was boldly saying what millions think."⁴²

Robinson attributed the decline of prestige in the House of Representatives not to the inferiority of its membership, but to the influence of machine politics. His

⁴⁰Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 1 sess., April 8, 1909, p. 1228.

⁴¹Speech, "The Paramount Danger to American Political Institutions," Iron and Hardware Association of Boston, Massachusetts, January 24, 1905, Robinson Papers.

⁴²Lonoke Weekly Democrat (Arkansas), editorial, October 31, 1907.

descriptions of Congressman of the time were fearless and quite picturesque:

The gentleman from Iowa, Mr. Hepburn, lion-hearted and aggressive; the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. Dalzell, the smoothest of the smooth; the gentleman from Ohio, Mr. Grosvener, the partisan defender of the machine; polished and courtly, Beutell of Illinois gives respectability to his party's organization in the House, while "Uncle Joe" Cannon, the speaker, is the mighty wahoo, wang-wang of the wacky wack! He is the boss of the machine. They can blow up a storm and make a rough sea, or pour oil on the troubled waters and calm them at will. His power is autocratic. No legislation of importance can pass against his opposition. He is fearless, aggressive, and fair. Yet he openly declares himself responsible for every bill that passes, and declares that no law shall pass against his will. He is not afraid to assume responsibility for his acts. He does not quibble; when assailed he retaliates with vigor. Much has been said in Congress during the last few years and in the press of his unlimited power. It is nearly all true. There are also many things true that have never been told. The speaker dictates legislation. He had done it absolutely during the last four years. He has always won. Insurgents have arisen and defied him. I have seen opposition to his views rise like a tide and threaten to overwhelm him. When the test came, however, he always rose equal to the occasion and overcame his adversaries. When once his mind is made, he holds tight reign and cracks the whip of party loyalty above the backs of recalcitrant members, and like startled sheep they struggle into line.⁴³

Thousands of bills on every conceivable matter showered Congress, making it impossible for any legislator to consider each one. To expedite action and perpetuate our democratic way of government, Robinson recommended a system that restricted the jurisdiction of Congress to public matters and then only to those measures sponsored by several

⁴³Speech on legislative methods in the House of Representatives, n.d., Robinson Papers.

members. He would have shifted pensions to a specific department, routed claims to the courts, and allocated distribution of documents and seeds to government clerks.⁴⁴ He felt that concentration of power in the federal government should be checked.

His comments about the federal judicial system ran the gamut from censure to praise. About 1905, while delivering a speech on "The Right and Dominion of Justice," he called the judiciary "the most autocratic power in this government," with impeachment ineffective as a remedy. Judicial legislation practiced under the guise of interpretation seemed unconstitutional to him. The appointment of federal judges for life, he said, caused them to become independent of public opinion, indifferent to public welfare, and oppressive of the individual citizen. However, the life appointment did have some advantages over the short, elective term of the state courts, and prevented a stampeding of justice "in times of great excitement" when the courts should stand "like immovable rocks between prejudice and justice." He expressed his confidence in the integrity of the federal and state courts by declaring that "our judicial tribunals are the most incorruptible and impartial institutions which have been established and maintained."⁴⁵

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 3 sess., January 18, 1911, p. 1066.

Robinson accepted the classical interpretation of the Supreme Court defining the limitation of federal control in interstate commerce to apply to transportation alone. He stated, "Congress has no control of manufacture; manufacture is not commerce."⁴⁶

Organized labor found Robinson friendly to its desires. During the 1908 session he joined other Democrats and sought legislation which would prevent abuses of the court. He heartily endorsed the eight-hour day, limitations upon the use of the injunction to break strikes, and exemption of labor organizations from the provision of the anti-trust laws. He promoted legislation that controlled public health and the welfare of children but enforcement of these laws he felt was "exclusively within the police powers of the states."⁴⁷ One of his most accurate predictions dealt with workman's compensation and old age security benefits:

Many reforms are being accomplished through organized labor, many others will be wrought out in the future. Among them will come the right to laboring men to protection against hardships resulting from the swift crises of industrial change. I know . . . the day is approaching when the man who toils will not be left entirely helpless, victims of industrial crises, which they neither bring about nor can prevent. . . . Another reform . . . is a suitable provision for the old age workers, and those unable to work by reason of injury. England has already established a pension system of aid for old

⁴⁶Speech on federal incorporation of corporations, n.d., Robinson Papers.

⁴⁷Robinson to Rabbi Ephraim Frisch, April 9, 1910, ibid.

and disabled workers. . . . The time is not yet ripe. But I venture into the sphere of prophecy to tell you that some of those who now hear me will see the pension roll of the superannuated and disabled laborer exceed that of the soldier.⁴⁸

His views on foreign policy were voiced only once in a speech concerning the termination of a treaty made with Russia in 1832. This treaty recognized the validity of American passports, but Russia had discriminated against American-Jews and had forbidden their entrance. Robinson suggested sending a special ambassador as liaison officer to Russia; then if she still refused to recognize all American citizens, the United States should sever relations with her.⁴⁹

In 1905 Robinson deserted the fight for a larger navy because he was angered at the refusal of Congress to allocate funds for public buildings (including several post offices for Arkansas). He stormed, "Millions for battleships but nothing for public buildings."⁵⁰ He was back in the fold, however, by 1907; for while he defended the efforts of the Hague Tribunal to bring about international peace and disarmament, he encouraged the construction of an American navy to become "the greatest on earth, so that the flag she flies may indeed become a terror to tyrants, . . . as she is already

⁴⁸Speech, Labor Day address, Corning, Arkansas, September 4, 1911, ibid.

⁴⁹Cong. Rec., 62 Cong., 2 sess., December 13, 1911, p. 315.

⁵⁰Ibid., 58 Cong., 3 sess., February 28, 1905, p. 3703.

an inspiration to patriots in every land."⁵¹ He cited as an example, the dramatic rise of Japan and attributed this to the "magnificent navy which she built and the indomitable spirit of her people."

A year later Robinson broke with his party and supported President Roosevelt in endorsing an amendment to increase the number of new battleships from two to four. He declared that since we could not depend on Russia in case of emergency in the Orient, we must therefore maintain a two-ocean navy.

Every part of the United States is equally sacred, and it is of equal importance that we should prepare for the defense of the Pacific coast as we should that of the Atlantic slope. I come from an interior state, where no enemy could ever put a foot on an inch of its soil; but every foot of American soil is equally sacred to me.⁵²

He was equally enthusiastic in promoting international peace and believed money spent in this manner would do more good in the end than maintaining a large armament program. On three occasions from 1910 to 1912 Robinson introduced a joint resolution providing for a meeting of all legislative bodies of the world. This was a forerunner of his active participation in the Interparliamentary Union of the 1920's and 1930's. He foresaw the development of an organization

⁵¹Speech delivered to a commercial organization, 1907, Robinson Papers.

⁵²Cong. Rec., 60 Cong., 1 sess., April 15, 1908, p. 4799.

such as the United Nations and expressed this idea to the law partner of William F. Lemke, Fargo, North Dakota:

. . . the cause is perhaps the greatest in which any public man can interest himself. After careful study of the conferences which have been held for the promotion of International Peace, I am firmly convinced that this scheme is practicable. It cannot, of course, be accomplished in a few years, but within half a century or less we will have a "Union of Nations." He who is foremost in bringing this about will earn the gratitude of future generations.⁵³

Generally, Theodore Roosevelt and Robinson were on favorable and cooperative terms. But in the heat of the political campaign of 1904, Robinson pledged himself to "oppose with all his power the iniquitous policy of the Roosevelt administration."⁵⁴

An Arkansas delegation, headed by Senator James H. Berry, called upon the President and asked that he rescind an order that adversely affected some of their constituents. Roosevelt in his impulsive manner stated, "If you were not such estimable gentlemen, I should say you were a set of asses." Senator Berry, shocked by this remark, withdrew his request, left the White House, and was followed by the delegation with the exception of Robinson. Roosevelt turned to Robinson and curtly asked, "Well, what do you think of it?" "I think, Mr. President," Robinson replied, "that your

⁵³Robinson to J. E. Robinson, June 17, 1910, Robinson Papers.

⁵⁴Campaign literature, Robinson to his constituents, October 27, 1904, ibid.

treatment of that old Confederate soldier was a gross act of discourtesy to a fine old gentleman. You did not give him an opportunity to explain fully the case." His forthright answer gained him the respect of the President who granted the request of Senator Berry and thereafter frequently asked Robinson for his advice.⁵⁵

Robinson accused Roosevelt, presidential candidate for the Bull Moose Party in 1912, of accepting campaign funds from the International Harvester Company while at the same time lambasting corporate wealth for contributing to Republican campaign funds. However, in Little Rock on September 12, 1912, at an informal luncheon of the Lakes-to-the-Gulf Deep Waterway Convention, he gave the welcoming address for Roosevelt. He referred to Roosevelt's message to the 60th Congress requesting the construction of such a waterway, briefly reviewed his life and closed with this commendation, "But neither the organization of a new political party, his general services as chief executive, nor his experiences as a military hero constitute Mr. Roosevelt's chief title to enduring fame. He was influential and successful, if not great in more spheres of important and interesting endeavor than any other man our country has produced."⁵⁶ Two events

⁵⁵Harry Lee Williams, "Press release on life of Senator Joe T. Robinson on the occasion of the launching of the U. S. S. Joe T. Robinson at the Houston Naval Yards," January 6, 1943, ibid.

⁵⁶Speech, September 25, 1912, Robinson Papers.

of world-wide and age-long significance, the authorization of the Panama Canal and the peaceful termination of the war between Russia and Japan are his master achievements.*⁵⁷

Robinson's ten years of service in the House of Representatives closed with his election to the governorship of Arkansas in 1912. He had ably represented his district and had received a fair share of appropriations for federal buildings. His persistence secured the passage of many measures. In each Congress he reintroduced various measures until they won final approval. He sought new federal buildings, chiefly to house the post offices, at Pine Bluff, For-
dyce, Monticello, Malvern, Benton, and Stuttgart. He sponsored several bills for the development of Hot Springs, such as the Army and Navy Hospital, the federal bathhouse and the construction of streets and sewers. He secured the donation of lands for public schools, the Leo N. Levi Memorial Hospital, the Knights of Pythias Sanitarium and Bathhouse and obtained the sale of reservation land for the Hot Springs Masonic Lodge. He was influential in securing the approval of Congress for the establishment of the experimental rice station at Grand Prairie. This resulted in the advancing of prairie land from \$10 to \$40 an acre and in increasing the value of the crop to several hundred thousand dollars annually.⁵⁸ He had been influential also in making Congress aware

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Robinson's record, ibid.

that drainage and irrigation were of equal importance in reclamation work.

In the Sixty-Second Congress Robinson was chairman of the Public Lands Committee of the House, and six of the committee's sixteen reports dealt with matters relating to Arkansas. He staged an up-hill battle for the dredging, bank revetment, dike construction, and levee maintenance of the Ouachita and Arkansas rivers and their tributaries. His first attempts were ignored by the Committee on Rivers and Harbors, but eventually his efforts were successful. So prominent was his leadership in the Public Lands Committee that upon his resignation the committee members presented him with a large loving cup as a token of their high esteem.⁵⁹

At every opportunity Robinson had supported measures that would benefit his district and the state as a whole. From his early speaking days he had lauded the state's development and had encouraged Arkansans to develop a sense of pride and to resent any attempt to make its citizens the butt of crude jokes. In the House on January 23, 1908, Representative Elmer Lincoln Fulton was erroneously recognized as being from Arkansas, and he retorted that it was the worst remark ever made about him. Robinson arose and said, "There are two kinds of jokes. One of them everybody enjoys and

⁵⁹Log Cabin Democrat (Conway, Arkansas), December 20, 1912, Robinson Clippings.

the other nobody enjoys except the gentleman who perpetrates it. I want to say to the gentleman from Oklahoma and to this committee that while I am a member of this body a reflection of that sort can not be made upon my state and my people without my rising in my seat to resent it in proper parliamentary language."⁶⁰ After an exchange of words, Fulton walked over to Robinson, placed one hand on his shoulder, and grasped his hand with the other amid the plaudits of the House.

Robinson was faithful to his job, and while Congress was in session, he often spent about fourteen hours a day on legislation and committee hearings. He had little chance to pass legislation in his own name, since the Republicans controlled the House during his period of service except for the Sixty-Second Congress. He briefed himself well before he spoke, and his comments received the respect of both sides of the House. James M. Cox said, "He was a man who grew with every year and every responsibility."⁶¹ Champ Clark, Speaker of the Sixty-Second Congress, regarded him as "one of the ablest of the young members . . . and one of the most promising." Clark closed his letter, "Your attendance was good; your work on the committee was intelligent and effective,

⁶⁰Cong. Rec., 60 Cong., 1 sess., January 23, 1908, p. 1053.

⁶¹James M. Cox, Journey Through My Years (New York, 1926), 99.

and your debating qualities of a very high order. I have no hesitancy in saying these things because I have said them before and to a great many people."⁶²

The Hot Springs News, editorially, made a fitting comment on Robinson's Congressional career:

In retiring from Congress Mr. Robinson does so with the best wishes of his constituents. They feel that in assuming the duties as Governor of the State Mr. Robinson has taken a step forward which will probably lead him to higher things in the future. He has made them a true and faithful congressman. He has looked after the interests of his district, as well as those of the entire state, with an eye single to their advantage. No harder worker ever represented this district than Mr. Robinson, and while we all feel that the Chief Executive's office will be better, more ably, and more satisfactorily filled than it has been in the past four years, Mr. Robinson's retirement from Congress is a matter of regret to all.⁶³

⁶²Champ Clark to Robinson, February 13, 1912, Robinson Papers.

⁶³Newsclipping, December, 1912, Robinson Clippings.

CHAPTER IV

HIS GOVERNORSHIP AND HIS NOMINATION TO THE SENATE

Robinson had long had in mind his eventual candidacy for the office of either governor or United States Senator, and by 1902 he began definite plans toward his advancement. He courted public favor by supporting popular issues, speaking often, and cultivating the friendship of influential political leaders.

One of the first steps he made toward furthering his own political career was his break with Senator Jeff Davis, who had supported him in 1902 and in return expected his support thereafter. But in spite of the influence of Davis, who had been elected to three terms as governor, Robinson refused to support him in 1904. Again in 1906, he favored Davis's opponent, James K. Jones, in the senate race, and in 1908, when Davis supported Supreme Court Justice W. F. Kirby in the governor's race, Robinson favored George W. Donaghey, who was the successful candidate. Robinson made several campaign speeches for Donaghey in which he took an open position on state issues. He supported the state poll tax amend-

ment and the bond authorization for city and county public improvements. He advocated an increase in the power of the Arkansas Railroad Commission and supported the initiative, referendum, and recall. On state or county-wide prohibition he did not commit himself; he simply stated that the issue should be decided by popular vote. The state banking laws of 1908 were defective and needed revision. He believed increased salaries for judges would attract better qualified men, and that political campaign funds should be limited and publicized. He said, "The people are entitled to know whose money and what amount of money is being used to secure or prevent the election of an officer." Robinson also predicted an early completion of the state capitol under the Donaghey administration and gave full support to a comprehensive system of highway development.¹

In June, 1908, at the suggestion of Governor-elect Donaghey, Robinson served as permanent chairman of the Arkansas Democratic Convention. His speech as chairman was well received and his conduct in office generally approved. A Sebastian County delegate stated that Robinson's rulings had been more "in consonance with Democratic doctrines" than those of any other chairman within the past ten years.² The

¹Speech, Piggott, Arkansas, August 17, 1908, Robinson Papers.

²Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), June 4, 1908.

editor of the Arkansas Democrat said that Robinson made "a most ideal chairman. . . . His rulings were fair and impartial and he had the convention wholly within his control at all times."³

Opportunity knocked at Robinson's door in 1905. The long-contemplated chance to make the governor's race came when Senator James P. Clarke offered to back Robinson as gubernatorial candidate. Robinson considered the opportunity, but decided against it because he did not have the necessary funds and an adequate political organization. In 1910 a group of politicians tried to persuade Robinson to oppose Donaghey, who was a candidate for a second term.

The realization of Robinson's ambition to become United States Senator appeared possible when he finally broke with Senator Jeff Davis by the announcement of his candidacy to succeed Davis in the Senate, subject to the Democratic preference primary of March, 1912. However, several complications arose. A tour of thirty counties showed little enthusiasm for his candidacy; Representative Brundidge of the Second District refused to withdraw from the race, and the indications were that a vote split three ways would bring about the re-election of Davis. About this time, information came that Governor Donaghey would not seek a third term, and

³Ibid.

Robinson's friends persuaded him to withdraw from the Senate race and become a candidate for governor.⁴

Two events at this time added to Robinson's popularity and enhanced the chances of his being a successful gubernatorial candidate. Robinson was asked to make a speech at the 1910 Confederate Reunion, at Mobile, Alabama. Armed with a promise to care for and entertain the veterans and with a petition from fifty-seven senators and representatives from the southern states, Robinson secured the 1911 convention for Little Rock.

The second event was an invitation to address a joint meeting of the Arkansas legislature on May 9, 1911. This gave Robinson an opportunity to state his opinions upon a number of important issues. He congratulated the legislature upon its ratification of the income tax amendment; its endorsement of the initiative, referendum, and recall; and its rejection of the convict lease system. He reminded the members that the national Democratic program supported the popular election of senators, the extension of reciprocity relations with Canada, and the publication of campaign contributions.

Robinson opened the gubernatorial campaign the Fourth of July, 1911, at Osceola, Mississippi County, speaking before

⁴Charles Jacobson to Robinson, October 12, 1911, Robinson Papers.

a gathering of 3,500 people. On July 14, his opponent, Hal L. Norwood, then attorney-general of Arkansas, announced his candidacy, but stated that he would continue to fill his present office and would not start his active campaign until December 1.

Only two candidates were definitely in the race until, in a surprise move on October 21, Governor Donaghey announced his candidacy for a third term. The Governor had been vacillating for some time, and his entrance had been predicted; but he seemed to have difficulty in deciding whether to run for re-election as governor or to oppose Jeff Davis and Stephen S. Brundidge in the Senate race.

Donaghey's campaign was based upon a defense of his two former terms. For his failure to have passed useful legislation, he blamed the legislature, which he claimed was controlled by the whiskey interests. He accused the "whiskey men" of stopping the construction of the state capitol building, of crippling the school program, and of curtailing services to the blind, deaf mutes, and Confederate veterans. He pointed to his accomplishments in requesting the passage of the Turner-Jacobson Bill and in obtaining an increased assessment of property.⁵ He reiterated his approval of the

⁵The basic Turner-Jacobson Act was drawn up by the Arkansas Tax Commission prior to meeting of the legislature in 1911. It was defeated in the Senate in regular session but passed in the extraordinary session that followed. Its purpose was to create uniform assessment of personal and

initiative and referendum, a law to protect labor, lower freight and passenger rates, and a state income tax.

Robinson set up an effective political organization and plunged into a vigorous campaign. By early July, 1911, he had made a swing around the state so successfully that a political henchman commented, "We are all adverse to early campaigns, but there is no getting around the fact that the early bird is the winner. That swing around the circle brought us in the votes by the hatful, even this early in the game."⁶

Senator Davis, impressed by Robinson's increasing strength, sent word that he would no longer openly oppose or support him.⁷ Later, Davis attached himself to Robinson's coat tails and thereby barely defeated Brundidge.

real property throughout the state by assessing at full value. It reduced drastic penalties of the old law, enforced penalties for low assessment or nonassessed property. It changed the period of assessment to provide more time for the tax assessor. It provided salary for the assessor and increased importance of his office. The Turner-Jacobson Act increased power of the county board of equalization and checked unregulated control of the county judge in such matters. The new act placed assessment of public utilities in the hands of state tax commission instead of each county assessor. Power of the state tax commission was not materially increased. Robinson endorsed the act and Donaghey opposed. The author's understanding of the act is that it would have been beneficial in forcing more equitable distribution of the tax burden throughout the state and particularly advantageous to small property owners and farmers.

⁶Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 27, 1911.

⁷Robinson to U. L. Meade, December 14, 1911, Robinson Papers.

Robinson had little opposition from Hal Norwood, who withdrew his candidacy on January 13, 1912, and thereafter supported Robinson actively and whole-heartedly. Donaghey, however, was a wealthy man and could put from \$40,000 to \$60,000 into the campaign while Robinson would have to borrow from his friends; Donaghey was also backed by a powerful political machine which had been built up through job-preference over a period of four years. Thousands of letters in Donaghey's behalf went out from the office of William K. Kirby, associate justice of the Arkansas Supreme Court.

In order to finance his campaign, Robinson used his ready assets, borrowed from the banks, and eventually had loans of \$7,000 from A. B. Banks of Fordyce. He opened his Little Rock headquarters in the Gleason Hotel under the direction of John H. Hineman, Henry S. Traylor, and Walter Hendricks. In Lonoke Mrs. Robinson supervised the mailing headquarters. By December, 1911, Robinson had canvassed forty-five counties and still needed to organize the eastern counties. He sought the aid of influential men in each county and asked them to "select at least five men in each township . . . on whom you can rely . . . to look after my interests. Put them to talking. Furnish me with their addresses, and I will write them all personal letters . . . [and] give definite attention to details in the organization.

Keep me posted."⁸

Early in the campaign Robinson took a stand on the more important issues. He opposed the Turner-Jacobson Bill because he believed it was unconstitutional to permit the county court to increase its revenue by raising the levy over that of the previous year. Likewise, he felt that the legislature could not extend or restrict the county court in levying a five-mill rate for general purposes. He opposed increased taxation, especially on the farmer who had more personal property on February 1 than on June 1. Finally, he believed that the bill concentrated the taxing power in the state Tax Commission and denied a practical way for the ordinary citizen to appeal. On the Turner-Jacobson Act, Robinson's position did not seem sound.

As for the prohibition issue, Robinson was chiefly concerned with the best method of regulating the liquor evil. Under local option, only nine counties out of seventy-five permitted the sale of liquor. Robinson preferred this method, but he declared openly that should statewide prohibition be approved by the voters in a general election, he would enforce it to the limit. Since this was such a controversial issue, his position was sound from a political angle.

Other proposed legislation of which he expressed

⁸Robinson to Senator J. S. Dill, December 16, 1911, ibid.

approval included quadrennial instead of biennial sessions of the legislature; four-year terms for the governor and ineligibility to re-election; the submission and adoption of an amendment providing for the recall; the establishment of a permanent system of highways; the maintenance of educational and charitable institutions; the passage of a corrupt practices act; the encouragement of the principle of arbitration and conciliation in labor controversies; the removal of state officers from the State Board of Election Commissioners; and the elimination of all state institutions from politics, as far as possible, by placing their control under a nonpolitical business management.⁹

Robinson repeatedly asserted that the heart of his program was "government in the interest of the public and free from the domination of special and corrupt influences." In criticizing the Donaghey administration, he deplored the deficit in the state treasury and urged that appropriations be kept within the limit of revenues. He attacked the management of the penitentiary and the convict lease system. He approved the recall of judges. His audiences felt that he studied "questions from the standpoint of the statesman rather than the politician" and sought to establish "nobler ideals in the public men of the state."¹⁰

⁹Robinson to Jerry Scanlan, December 9, 1911, ibid.

¹⁰Pope County Record (Russellville), July 7, 1911, Robinson Clippings.

After Donaghey's entrance into the race in October, Robinson denounced the Governor personally and sharply criticized his administration. For this, his brother, Ed Robinson, wrote a letter chiding him for his change of attitude toward a man for whom he had formerly campaigned. He suggested that attacking Donaghey might cause the public to sympathize with the underdog. Candidate Robinson answered that "the record of a public officer is always open to inspection, and the people have a right to know it. . . . While I recognize the necessity for fairness, and intend to be perfectly fair, I cannot understand how you expect me to defeat a man who claims to be peculiarly fitted to serve the State for a third term, and who claims I am unfitted, brags on the contrary, and fails to disclose the evils of his administration."¹¹

As the campaign advanced, Robinson concentrated entirely upon a personal attack, and sent thousands of blunt, direct, and forceful letters assailing Donaghey:

Governor Donaghey should not have entered the race. He declared his purpose to run for the Senate, and thinking he was acting in good faith, I decided to run for Governor. Of course, he has a perfect right to run . . . and I also have the right to defeat him . . . which . . . I confidently expect to do by an overwhelming majority.¹²

¹¹Robinson to E. R. Robinson, October 31, 1911, Robinson Papers.

¹²Robinson to F. W. Broadnas, December 14, 1911, ibid.

He seeks to be elected again so that he may peddle out the patronage of the Governor's office in an effort to defeat Senator Clarke two years hence. . . .¹³

Some of his friends . . . have promised him support in consideration of certain appointments and other favors. . . .¹⁴

The Governor was elected to complete the Capitol . . . within a year. Three years have passed and it is still unfinished. He promised to take the Capitol out of politics, and he has sunk it deeper in the mire. He is not sincere in the liquor question, having received the support of the whiskey men in every campaign.

His vetoes of measures and necessary items of appropriation for charitable and educational institutions of the State . . . emphasize his absurdity for running for a third term and the imperative necessity for his defeat.¹⁵

On February 1, 1912, Robinson wrote Senator James P. Clarke in Washington a very serious letter about the trend of the election. He had not received the Norwood votes in the quantity predicted. The liquor question, campaign expenses, and a host of other political problems worried him. Clarke answered:

I have been convinced all along that Donaghey, like all unscrupulous politicians plentifully supplied with money, is dangerous when an issue that the public must determine is at stake. . . . I note what you say about the figure the liquor question is likely to cut in the final stages of the campaign. This is always a dangerous and delicate question, and the demagogue's paradise is always on the prohibition end of it. Donaghey has humbugged both factions successfully on this question.

¹³Robinson to E. C. Horner, December 7, 1911, ibid.

¹⁴Robinson to J. C. Mitchell, December 6, 1911, ibid.

¹⁵Robinson to W. D. Atwood, December 14, 1911, ibid.

. . . He is no mean artist when it comes to playing the demagogue successfully. . . .¹⁶

Clarke sent letters and indirectly helped Robinson campaign, for it was well known that Donaghey planned to unseat Clarke when he came up for re-election to the Senate in 1914.

Robinson worked the harder of the two candidates. In southwestern Arkansas, he made twenty-six speeches in twenty days in mid-February. As the campaign became hotter, uncomplimentary remarks flew thick and fast:

Mr. Donaghey's unlimited gall is exceeded only by his extreme asininity. As Governor he has been a most woeful failure and he acknowledges it when he asks for "vindication." He has been governor by proxy and his every act and thought has been suggested. He has been untrue to the people and his administration has been weak, vacillating, and unfruitful of results. He has double-crossed the people, played to special interests, cliques and combines, impaired whatever usefulness he might have had by trickery and deception. He is a political trimmer, a parasitical hypocrite with a lust for office. . . . His two most effective campaign planks are the adoption of the Turner-Jacobson revenue bill and a state-wide prohibition bill. In this he is attempting to deceive the people, for both bills will be submitted to the people under the initiative and referendum amendment, and have no place in this campaign for governor.¹⁷

The Democratic primary occurred on March 27, 1912. A heavy vote was cast. Robinson was victorious by an impressive margin, 90,520 to Donaghey's 46,701. In the senatorial

¹⁶James P. Clarke to Robinson, February 3, 1912, ibid.

¹⁷Mariana Courier (Arkansas), March 2, 1912, Robinson Clippings.

race, Davis led Brundidge 72,005 to 62,269. Robinson released a statement to the press that was also carried in the religious publications of the state:

It is a high honor to be Governor of Arkansas and my gratification at the confidence manifested by the public in conferring the nomination upon me is marred by a heavy sense of responsibility. I invite the cooperation of all good citizens and invoke the guidance of the Almighty in the sincere effort, if elected, to give the State a clean and progressive administration.¹⁸

Robinson's expenses of \$11,870.37 made him determined to ask the next legislature for a bill to limit campaign expenditures.¹⁹ Robinson believed that many fine, well-qualified men would not seek political office solely because of the expense involved.

Robinson returned to Washington after his Democratic primary victory. His brother-in-law A. J. Walls was left to organize the Democratic State Convention to be held in Little Rock in June. Robinson suggested that Walls be chairman; W. H. Martin, permanent chairman; and Walter Hendricks, chairman of the rules committee. He further suggested the selection of Clarke, Davis, Hineman, and Robinson as the "big four" delegates to the national convention at Baltimore.²⁰ By asking his recent political opponent, H. L. Norwood, to make

¹⁸The Baptist Advance (Little Rock), April 4, 1912.

¹⁹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), n.d., Robinson Clippings.

²⁰Robinson to A. J. Walls, May 6, 1912, Robinson Papers.

the nominating speech for governor, he poured oil into the political wounds.²¹

A. J. Walls, with the aid of Walter Hendricks and others, in the latter part of May, set up the convention in line with Robinson's wishes; Hendricks sent Robinson a copy of the plan of organization, which he approved. By May 20, Robinson had prepared the platform for the convention, which naturally reflected the chief topics that he planned to discuss in his address.²²

W. E. Kavanaugh wired Robinson on May 30 that some opposition had developed over the preliminary organization. Robinson directed Kavanaugh to iron out the opposition with the help of Walls and Hendricks if it came from Robinson's supporters; if it arose from Donaghey's supporters in an effort to control the convention, Robinson said he would follow the universal rule of permitting the incoming candidate the right to organize the convention. If Donaghey's supporters interfered, Robinson would take the issue to the convention floor and crush it.²³

The state convention opened June 5, and went according to plan. Robinson was selected chairman of the delegation to the national convention at Baltimore. The delegates were

²¹Ibid.

²²Robinson to G. W. Hendricks, May 20, 1912, ibid.

²³Robinson to W. M. Kavanaugh, May 30, 1912, ibid.

instructed for Champ Clark at Robinson's direction and placed under unit rule. Bennett Clark, son of the Speaker of the House, thanked the convention for pledging the delegation to his father.

Attorney-General Hal L. Norwood made the nominating speech for Robinson, calling attention to his "long and splendid record of public service." He declared that Robinson as governor would continue to take a positive and fearless position upon all important questions and would always demonstrate "that ability and devotion to duty that has crowned all his efforts with success."²⁴ In conclusion Norwood paid tribute to the love, devotion, and service of Mrs. Robinson.

Editorially, Norwood's nominating address also met with approval:

In extending an invitation to Mr. Norwood to make the nominating speech, Mr. Robinson acknowledges the high admiration he had for him as an opponent, and in accepting that invitation, Mr. Norwood shows that he is of that stock of Democrats who are able to rise above the fog of personal politics. No incident within recent political history in Arkansas has set a finer example of manly action, nor has anything occurred to demonstrate more emphatically the spirit of harmony that dominates the leading figures in the Democratic ranks today.²⁵

Throughout Robinson's life, this interesting political trait expressed itself. He consistently liquidated his political opposition by friendship, service, and appointments.

²⁴Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), June 6, 1912.

²⁵Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

Robinson's address stressed the necessity of a spirit of state harmony and he discussed such vital issues as a sound cash basis for the state, adequate educational facilities, a permanent highway-building program, federal control of the levee system along the Mississippi River, and general reform in governmental methods.

In regard to national affairs, Robinson disapproved the conduct of Taft and Roosevelt in their vicious attacks on each other, and advocated the selection of Champ Clark of Missouri, who, he thought, could receive the support of both conservative and progressive elements of the Democratic party.²⁶ He closed his convention address by referring to Clark as the "white plume" who would lead the Democrats to victory in November.²⁷

When the National Convention opened at Baltimore on June 22, Robinson served as floor leader for Clark, seconded his nomination, and called upon the delegates to select a candidate acceptable to all loyal Democrats:

²⁶Robinson analyzed the strengths of the various candidates in the preconvention period. He looked to Champ Clark as the only candidate who could concentrate the solid vote of the party. He believed that Wilson would be opposed by the foreigners and the Harmon element, that Underwood would be opposed because of his pension record and his location in the Deep South, and that Harmon would be opposed by the Bryan wing of the party. Robinson to H. F. Reagan, May 11, 1912, Robinson Papers.

²⁷Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), June 6, 1912.

. . . Let us counsel together and choose as our candidate one of high character and unquestioned ability, whose candidacy will unify Democrats and without compromise of principle attract independent and disaffected Republican votes. Let us select a leader who has been always loyal to the cause of the people, liberal, broad-minded, cautious and patriotic; a Democrat of unfaltering faith and undoubted integrity, one who has never bolted, but who has uniformly supported the Democratic platforms and nominees.

Such a man is Champ Clark. He comes from the very heart and center of the Union. His integrity has remained unquestioned, his good name unsullied through more than a quarter of a century of faithful public service.²⁸

The convention became deadlocked between the forces of Clark and Wilson with Eugene N. Foss, Judson Harmon and Oscar W. Underwood receiving several scattered votes. Clark received more than a clear majority of the votes for nine ballots, but on the fourteenth ballot William Jennings Bryan, disgruntled over Tammany's support of Clark, now switched his vote to Wilson. He made slanderous remarks about Clark and referred to his managers as "seasoned, veteran politicians who had no hesitation in making bargains with machine leaders in the cities and states."²⁹ Wilson and Oscar W. Underwood combined forces and, aided by Bryan's strength, broke the deadlock on the forty-sixth ballot and secured the nomination for Wilson.

Robinson felt that Clark's defeat resulted perhaps

²⁸Ibid., June 23, 1912.

²⁹Arthur S. Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House (Princeton, New Jersey, 1947), 400, 453.

equally from Bryan's "bitter attack" and the mismanagement of his campaign for the nomination. He stated "off the record" that he thought the party would regret Clark's defeat.³⁰ Publicly, however, as a loyal Democrat he pledged his unqualified support to Wilson.³¹

Some controversy arose as to the real reason for Clark's defeat. Arthur S. Link supports the position that Bryan's move was not a decisive factor in bringing about the defeat of Clark.³² Clark later stated that he lost the "nomination solely through the vile and malicious slanders of Colonel William Jennings Bryan. True, these slanders were by innuendo, but they were no less deadly for that reason."³³

During the remainder of the Congressional session, Robinson remained in Washington. He returned to Arkansas in time to participate in the general campaigning during August and early September. He appointed A. J. Walls to make assessments and collect campaign funds but cautioned him to be careful about accepting funds from questionable sources.³⁴

³⁰Robinson to G. W. Hendricks, July 12, 1912, Robinson Papers.

³¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 7, 1912.

³²Link, Wilson: The Road to the White House, 463.

³³Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

³⁴Robinson to W. G. Hutton, July 26, 1912, Robinson Papers.

He suggested that Walls speak in strategic areas and that he assign Hamilton Traylor, Charles Jacobson, L. V. Ludwig, and John Hineman to the campaign headquarters.³⁵ Robinson made a limited speaking tour in August and September and discussed practically the same issues that he had used in the primary campaign. His victory over the Republican candidate was a foregone conclusion.

The national campaign for the Democratic party was next on Robinson's agenda. He congratulated William F. McCombs upon his selection as National Democratic Chairman,³⁶ and in late July conferred with him about speaking engagements. As a member of the Congressional party, he attended the notification ceremony of Governor Wilson at Sea Girt, New Jersey, and wrote Henry Morgenthau that he felt every one was impressed with Wilson's ability.³⁷ He wrote A. S. Burleson chairman of the Speakers Bureau that he would be available for speaking assignments from October 22 to November 5, and he mentioned that he had been asked to speak in Massachusetts, Washington, Indiana, and Minnesota. He felt that he would be more effective in Massachusetts or Indiana than in any of the other states.³⁸

³⁵Robinson to A. J. Walls, July 26, 1912, ibid.

³⁶Robinson to William F. McCombs, July 17, 1912, ibid.

³⁷Robinson to Henry Morgenthau, July 27, 1912, ibid.

³⁸Robinson to A. S. Burleson, U. S. Representative from Texas, August 24, 1912, ibid.

In September, Robinson and A. J. Walls of Lonoke were placed on the National Advisory Campaign Committee to coordinate national and state organizations and to raise campaign funds. Robinson's speaking schedule was unexpectedly increased when he took over the engagements of Senator James Kimble Vardaman who had become ill.

Robinson wanted to set aside November and December to rest and make plans before his inauguration as governor in January. But as always he had to make some exceptions. He had secured Speaker Champ Clark to give the principal address at the Arkansas state fair on November 11, but made his own attendance contingent upon certain compliances of Hot Springs' authorities as noted in his letter to George R. Belding:

You will remember that on the occasion of my last visit to Hot Springs there was some discussion of permitting gambling on horse racing in violation of the laws of the State. You will also recall that I deemed it my duty to say to you that as prospective Governor of the state, I cannot connive at or consent to such arrangements. Neither will I attend the Fair unless I am assured that this will not be done. Whatever view may be taken of the advisability of such legislation, the laws of the State must be respected, and no man who respects himself and who is charged with the public responsibility of enforcing the laws can connive at its violation.³⁹

Robinson's demands were met, and he introduced Clark before a large crowd at the Hot Springs Fair.

Another event which interrupted Robinson's rest

³⁹Robinson to George R. Belding, July 23, 1912, ibid.

occurred in December when retiring Governor Donaghey, in a moment of petty resentment against the state and local authorities dealt out wholesale pardons to criminals. Robinson wired the Arkansas Democrat from Washington:

If press reports are true, Governor Donaghey's action in pardoning 360 convicts at the close of his four years' service as an alleged protest against a system which he has permitted to prevail throughout his administration is unwarranted and retrogressive. It is a gross abuse of a power which should be exercised for the sake of justice, reasonably seasoned with mercy. It is a blow at the judges and juries of the state, an insult to those who stand for law and order; it is an impeachment of his own intelligence. . . .⁴⁰

Public resentment in Arkansas demanded that the pardoning power be taken from the hands of the governor and placed with a pardoning board.

A third event was an invitation from the Arkansas State Teachers Association to address that body on December 26, and Robinson responded with a speech praising general education and religious freedom as fundamental American institutions. He advocated the removal of schools from politics, an increase in the appropriations to state-supported schools, a raise of teachers' salaries, the construction of modern buildings for rural schools, and the integration of kindergartens in the public school system.⁴¹ He cautioned the teaching profession against striving for too great uniformity among students, each of whom had been given by his

⁴⁰Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), December 19, 1912.

⁴¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), December 27, 1912.

Creator a personality distinctively his own.⁴²

The time was drawing near for Robinson to enter upon his duties as governor when a momentous incident occurred that completely changed the course of his life. Senator Jeff Davis, victorious over Brundidge in the March primary of 1912, died suddenly of a heart attack at his home in Little Rock on January 2, 1913. He was to have been routinely re-elected for a six-year term by the legislature on or before January 21, 1913. His death caused a shift of power politics in Arkansas.

As soon as Robinson learned of the death of Davis, he left Little Rock immediately and went hunting in the vicinity of his old home, Lonoke, so that under no circumstances could he be reached. There he discussed his political plans with Judge A. J. Walls and Walter Hendricks. A call was sent to have every influential Robinson supporter in the state at the Marion Hotel, Sunday, January 5, 1913, for an important conference. These political advisers analyzed various movements, checked the standing of each senator and representative from every district, and then advised Robinson to enter the race. Meanwhile, Hal L. Norwood, Stephen S. Brundidge, and John Hineman immediately avowed themselves to be candidates, but Hineman later withdrew.

Robinson believed that now or never was his chance

⁴²Ibid.

to enter the Senate. To run for governor again in two years would mean another campaign expense, and Robinson was already in debt. A senator's term covered a period of six years, and he had long cherished the ambition to be a senator. If he waited to run until 1914, he would have to run against his friend Clarke, who was seeking a second term. Even with a second term as governor he would have to wait until 1918; and two years out of office would weaken his political machine.⁴³

The decision was not easy for Robinson to make. He had ridden into office on a wave of protest, and many voters would feel betrayed by his resignation of the governorship. On the other hand, he believed that he had the necessary legislative votes to be elected to the Senate. He announced his decision to run January 8:

The untimely and unfortunate death of Senator Davis has created exceptional conditions in the political affairs of our State, which, automatically, work changes in the plans and purposes of many persons. The State's equal representation in the United States Senate is involved, and I now submit my candidacy for the long term, which does not begin until March 4.

Deeply sensible of the obligation imposed upon me by the generous confidence of the people who elected me governor, I would not seek or accept the senatorship if I did not believe that in doing so my usefulness to the State would be increased.

The constructive work of my administration as governor must be performed during the session of the legisla-

⁴³Ira D. Oglesby to Robinson, January 4, 1913; Robinson to Oglesby, January 6, 1913, Robinson Papers.

ture, which will have completed its labors before service in the Senate under the long term will begin. The measures that I have championed will have been either approved or rejected before the senatorial duties will be assumed in the event I am elected.

No one can question that after the legislature has adjourned, service in the U. S. Senate will afford broader opportunities for usefulness than a continuation in the governor's office. The duties of the governor's office, when the legislature is not in session, are largely administrative.

It is well known that an extra session of Congress will be convened, probably the 15th of April, to reorganize the government under Democratic administration, and to revise our tariff laws. This will constitute, in some sense, a crisis in the affairs of the Democratic party, and of the nation. My active service, for ten years, in the House of Representatives, during which time our tariff laws have been twice revised, has familiarized me with congressional duties, and the training thus obtained may be an indispensable asset to effective service in the Senate at this time. It happens, also, to be true that by the generous favor of the electors who sent me to Congress, I have been able to form a personal acquaintance with all the members of both houses of Congress and the other principal officers of the government.

After hearing the counsel of many friends throughout the State who concur in this conclusion, I offer myself as a candidate for the long term to succeed the late and lamented Senator Davis in the U. S. Senate.⁴⁴

Though a feeling of unrest prevailed, the House and Senate attempted to organize for the coming legislative session. Robinson forces had set to work as early as July, 1912, to put key men in important positions.

The Marion Hotel in Little Rock was the political capitol of Arkansas for the first two weeks of January, 1913.

⁴⁴Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), January 8, 1913.

Three candidates for the speaker of the House, S. A. Miller, Joe Hardage, and Carroll Armstrong, and the three candidates for president of the Senate, W. K. Oldham, T. J. Raney, and A. C. Martin, were rounding up support. The office of the president pro tempore of the state senate had two supporters of Robinson opposing each other: Oldham and Martin. Martin's withdrawal brought overwhelming support to Oldham and indicated that Robinson's forces would control the organization of the Senate. The issue became difficult to define clearly in the House, but Hardage became the Speaker. Behind the scenes in each case the skillful politician, Judge A. J. Walls, smoothed disturbances when they occurred.⁴⁵

Robinson resigned his seat in the House of Representatives on January 14, 1913, and was sworn in as Governor on January 16. Throughout the summer and fall he had sought the best advice available in meeting the problems ahead. He conferred with R. W. Hart about the charitable institutions; with President John H. Reynolds of the University of Arkansas he spoke about methods of financing that institution. He discussed revenue and financial matters with J. F. Loughborough, and the fish and game conservation problem with E. V. Visart.

The inaugural address of Governor Robinson on January 16, 1913, was a statement of his conception of the function

⁴⁵Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 11, 1913.

of sound democratic government and its relationship to the sovereign will of the people. He defined good government as "demonstrated in that administration where the popular will is most accurately expressed and promptly executed. Government should not exist to confer special opportunities upon a favored class, nor its functions exercised by a so-called 'superior class'". While government should seldom interfere with liberty, it must often restrict the liberty of the citizen "for the protection and welfare of his fellows. Violation of the right of private property by the state was confiscation. . . . Any contract made by the state must be honored and promptly paid."

Regarding taxation, Robinson said the rate should vary with the appropriation, and it was the legislature's duty to provide revenue sufficient to meet the expenses of government. He called attention to the deficit of \$750,000 created by the reduction of the general revenue rate by one-half mill during the Donaghey administration and expressed his purpose to "restore the State's finances to a cash basis as speedily as due regard for all existing conditions will permit."

Robinson noted the distinctions between legislative and executive duties: the legislator's primary task is to determine questions of policy, while the executive, though not responsible for the existence of the law, is charged with

its execution regardless of personal conviction. He held the importance of law enforcement paramount: "political influence, social prestige, or wealth must not weigh in the balance." The abuse of the pardon power thwarted justice and made a mockery of trial by jury, he declared. Patronage used properly consisted in the appointment of "those who seem worthiest and best qualified." In conclusion he stated that the people had the right to expect the proper function of both legislative and executive branches in the gigantic tasks of the incoming administration.

Shortly after his inaugural address, Governor Robinson sent his message to the Thirty-Ninth General Assembly, asking that the body stay within the sixty-day limit for a regular session and that only measures of importance be considered. He noted that prohibition was no longer a matter for legislation, since it had been approved under the initiative of the previous September.

The financial situation of the state was in Robinson's estimation the most important item before the legislature. He took up the questions of incoming revenue, accumulating deficit, and appropriations. He suggested liquidation of the state debt of \$750,000 by bond issue, the loan to be amortized over a period of years. Handling of finances could be systematized by a budget system under control of three state officers and the presiding officers of Senate

and House. The budget should include a rate of nine-tenths of a mill for state colleges and university; the rate of one-half mill voted for construction of the state capitol should be suspended, since accrued revenue would provide for its completion before the budget went into effect. Two ways were suggested for providing additional revenue: a reasonable penalty for non-assessment of personal property, and the increase of the franchise tax rate to the prevailing level in neighboring states.

Governor Robinson recommended a corrupt-practices act limiting campaign expenditures and giving full publicity to their use. He also asked for investigation of the penitentiary system and proposed putting it under a commission of three members to replace supervision by state officers. To systematize and modernize accounting methods, the new Governor recommended creation of an Economy and Efficiency Commission. He proposed a Workmen's Compensation Act fair to both employer and employee as a substitute for the "old doctrine of negligence liability."

Other recommendations were: the reapproval of the income tax amendment which was erroneously vetoed by Donaghey; the ratification of the amendment providing for direct election of U. S. Senators; the preservation of the old State House which is not used for the State Historical Collection; and the establishment of convict-labor rock quarries to

furnish low-cost gravel to towns and counties. Robinson also requested the creation of a State Highway Commission to make investigations and surveys and "propose the location of roads under a general plan or system."

In calling attention to the need for the revision of state banking laws, he referred to a bill approved by the Arkansas Bankers Association. He also sought adequate provision for the Confederate Home, the Hospital for Nervous Diseases, the School for the Blind, and the Deaf Mute Institute. He asked for more liberal maintenance for the Arkansas National Guard, the establishment of the kindergarten in the common schools, and a revision of the game laws.

Governor Robinson concluded with a plea for cooperation between executive and legislative branches:

In approving or rejecting recommendations for legislation by the executive, the General Assembly is within its right. . . . Take these suggestions in the spirit in which they are made. Enact them into laws if, in your judgment, the public welfare requires. Modify them wherein you believe them to be defective. Reject them if, in your conscience, they are found to be wrong. Let us work together at all times for the advancement of the State.⁴⁶

The Thirty-Ninth General Assembly, following Robinson's suggestions, placed upon the statute books of the state much of the legislation that remains basic law today. Among its accomplishments were the creation of a State Banking

⁴⁶Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), "Message of Joe T. Robinson, Governor, to the Thirty-Ninth General Assembly," January 16, 1913.

Department; the establishment of a Bureau of Labor Statistics to investigate labor problems and working conditions; the substitution of electrocution for hanging in death sentences for capital crimes; permission for corporations or individuals to construct dams across any non-navigable stream for the purpose of developing hydro-electricity; and the creation of the Little Rock-Memphis Highway District. The above legislation was accomplished during Robinson's brief term as governor.

During the month of January the fight for the vacant senate seat loomed as a turbulent background issue. The Arkansas Democrat came out strongly for Robinson, asking the anti-Robinson forces to cease their filibustering and opposition. Conditions were favorable to his election for two reasons: he was the incoming governor; and many of his friends were swept into power in various offices on the same issues. Petitions and letters were circulated widely; the Jeff Davis forces were asked by their leader, Frank Pace, to support Robinson against Brundidge and Donaghey.⁴⁷

There was opposition to Robinson, however, from many people and from several state newspapers, among them the Paragould Daily Press, which held that Robinson was not in-

⁴⁷ Frank Pace to Col. W. F. Slemmons, January 12, 1913, Robinson Papers.

dispensable and should be cast into oblivion.⁴⁸ The Blytheville Herald chided Robinson for his greed in striving for three jobs at once.⁴⁹

The Legislature's selection of a senator came on the first ballot of January 28, 1913. A breathless silence followed the conclusion of roll call. Robinson lacked six votes necessary to win the nomination. Immediately, one by one, nine members changed their votes giving Robinson the nomination.

When the total count was read, Robinson had 71; Brundidge 36; Norwood 15; Kirby 8; Oldfield 1; Reid 1; and Taylor had 1.⁵⁰

Stephen S. Brundidge, a bitter loser, issued a statement that he would oppose Robinson in the 1918 Democratic primary, saying:

. . . I would rather go down in defeat with the confidence [of my friends] than to hold the highest office in the nation, with the guilty knowledge that I had been elected to it by the place hunter and the machine politician. . . . I am now ready to begin a new fight . . . for the success of Democratic principles and Democratic reforms . . . and I now serve notice . . . that I am in the field to the finish. . . .⁵¹

⁴⁸Paragould Daily Press (Arkansas), January 16, 1913, Robinson Clippings.

⁴⁹Blytheville Herald (Arkansas), January 16, 1913, ibid.

⁵⁰Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock) January 30, 1913. Governor Donaghey appointed J. N. Heiskell, assistant editor of the Arkansas Gazette, as senator. The legislature elected C. C. Kavanaugh to complete the short term until March 4, 1913.

⁵¹Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), January 29, 1913.

But William Jennings Bryan sent congratulations to Robinson: "Accept congratulations on your election to the Senate. Your Congressional experience will be of service to you and I am sure you will measure up to the expectations excited by your splendid career."⁵²

Many of Robinson's supporters were disappointed over his decision to abandon the governorship after so short a time in office. The voters had elected him to clean up the alledged corruption in state government which included the lavish spending in constructing the State Capitol, the power of the liquor interests, the evasion of taxes, and the mismanagement of the penitentiary. Many citizens felt that he should not consider his own advancement until he had corrected these abuses. Robinson in noting this unfavorable attitude remarked that he could not be elected "dogcatcher" if he were running for office at that time. But by 1918 so many events had intervened that only Brundidge remembered the circumstances of the Senator's election by the legislature. Robinson resigned his governorship on March 10, 1913, and entered upon his duties as United States Senator.

⁵²William Jennings Bryan to Robinson, February 3, 1913, Robinson Papers.

CHAPTER V

ROBINSON AND THE WILSON ADMINISTRATION

Robinson, the last United States Senator to be elected by a state legislature, took his seat in a rather inauspicious manner on March 10, 1913. He was assigned to the Committee on Claims, Agriculture and Forestry, Public Lands, and was appointed to a joint committee for the revision of the laws of the United States. Later, he served on the Appropriations, Foreign Relations, and Interstate Commerce committees. He also helped on special committees such as Census, Printing, Expenditures in the Department of Justice, and the Pacific Railroad committees.

In the eight years of the Wilson administration, Robinson continued his House record of strict party regularity and followed the President at every turn of political events. His loyalty became more than party loyalty. Though he had not supported Wilson at the Baltimore convention, Robinson developed a respect for Wilson's ideas and a deep love for this man whom he later characterized the "greatest living statesman."¹ He never failed to defend Wilson against

¹Address, Senate Campaign of 1918, Robinson Papers.

personal and partisan attacks and through the years kept a large portrait of the President hanging in his office.

Wilson immediately realized that staunch and loyal support was necessary to secure reform legislation and to fulfill his pledges to the voters. Initially, he was to suffer some disappointment, for such progressive senators as T. W. Hardwick and Hoke Smith of Georgia, James A. O'Gorman of New York, and James E. Martine of New Jersey, grew indifferent and "were reluctant to follow his leadership" in anything. But the old guard in the Senate, according to Joseph Tumulty, was composed of men like Mark Smith of Arizona, Thomas A. Martin and Claude A. Swanson of Virginia, Ollie James of Kentucky, John Sharp Williams of Mississippi, Charles A. Culberson of Texas, F. M. Simmons of North Carolina, and John Walter Smith of Maryland, who accepted Robinson into the fold; and contrary to every prophecy and prediction made by their enemies, they stood with the President through every fight in the finest way, and never deserted his leadership for a moment. Often, Wilson remarked, "My head is with the progressives in the Democratic party, but my heart, because of the way they stood by me, is with the so-called old guard in the Senate. They stand without hitching."² However, Arthur S. Link in writing on the Progressive

² Joseph P. Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson As I Know Him (New York, 1921), 101.

Era places Robinson in a different category. Generally, Link described most of the Democrats in the Senate as able, responsible, and progressive, as eager as Wilson himself to give the administration success. He continued, "The young progressive group constituted a virtual galaxy: Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas, Henry F. Ashurst of Arizona, Thomas J. Walsh of Montana, William Hughes of New Jersey, Henry F. Hollis of New Hampshire, Robert L. Owen of Oklahoma, and Atlee Pomerene of Ohio."³ Even the Conservatives as Simmons of North Carolina and John H. Bankhead of Alabama were ready to unite to encourage the strong Democratic determination to make good.

As a member of this progressive group, Robinson began his term of office working diligently in the committees to which he was assigned. In the field of domestic legislation he first drew attention to himself by opposing a request of his own constituents for an increased rate on rice, when the Underwood-Simmons tariff bill came up for discussion. The President commended his action in a note written May 20, 1913:

May I not give myself the pleasure of saying that I am proud to belong to a party consisting of such men as yourself, who can meet as you have met the suggestions of those who would have you prefer the interests of a

³ Arthur S. Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917 (New York, 1954), 35.

locality to the interests of the nation and the party.⁴

The Glass-Owens bill drew Robinson's attention next. He advocated the establishment of a uniform rediscount rate in all regional banks for the same type of loans, and cheaper rates of interest. The bill underwent much debate and revision and was responsible for a near split in the party. While Robinson's participation in the debate was limited, he cast his vote for the legislation which established the Federal Reserve System. The Senator considered the Glass-Owens Act the greatest single piece of constructive legislation during the Wilson administration.

Robinson's interest in anti-trust legislation dated back to his term in the state legislature, where he had consistently fought against railroad monopolies and trusts. When the Clayton Anti-Trust bill was being considered in the Senate, however, the Senator was absent due to illness on the day it was finally passed. Meanwhile, President Wilson apparently lost interest in the bill and determined to make the Federal Trade Commission bill with the Stevens amendment the cornerstone of his anti-trust program.⁵ This bill faced only fragmentary opposition and was passed by a bipartisan vote of 53 to 16. Senator Robinson returned to Washington

⁴Ray S. Baker to Robinson (Wilson's comment repeated), March 8, 1929, Robinson Papers.

⁵Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 72.

in time to vote for it on September 8.⁶

Robinson was always a champion of the farmer. His interest was evidenced in the Federal Farm Loan Act by his amending the bill "to provide capital for agricultural development, to create a standard form of investment based upon farm mortgages, to equalize rates of interest upon farm loans, to furnish a market for U. S. bonds, to provide for the investment of postal savings deposits, to create government depositories and financial agents for the United States, and for other purposes."⁷ This amendment was embodied in the final draft of the bill which was passed by a vote of 58 to 5.

The results of the flood control legislation were disappointing to Robinson who had assisted in its preparation. The Flood Control Act of March 1, 1917, placed the improvement of the Mississippi River and its tributaries upon a permanent basis. When the bill came up for a vote, as presiding officer Robinson was largely instrumental in securing its passage by averting a filibuster. After the United States entered the war, Congress refused to make the appropriation necessary to carry out the provisions of the act. Believing the prevention of floods was essential to

⁶Cong. Rec., 63 Cong., 2 sess., September 8, 1914, p. 14796.

⁷Ibid., 64 Cong., 1 sess., April 17, 1916, p. 6269, May 4, 1916, p. 7413.

the production of food for the war effort, Robinson introduced an amendment for an appropriation of \$10,600,000, which to his disappointment was cut to \$6,500,000. He became so incensed with Senators L. S. Overman and Oscar Underwood because they yielded to the demands of the House and accepted the reduction, that Vice-President Marshall interceded to prevent a Robinson-Overman altercation.⁸

Robinson was appointed a member of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, and consistently represented rural America's antipathy toward cheap immigrant labor. Accordingly, he supported the Burnett bill which required a literacy test for immigrants admitted to the United States.⁹ He was also appointed a member of the conference committee on this important measure, although his stand as a new junior senator did not entitle him to such recognition. The bill finally passed over the President's veto February 5, 1917, after being considered for two years.

As chairman of a Joint Commission on Indian Affairs, Senator Robinson rendered outstanding service in investigating the health conditions on an Indian reservation in New Mexico and providing irrigation for the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington. This investigation disclosed alarming

⁸Ibid., 65 Cong., 1 sess., June 2, 1917, p. 3234.

⁹Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen to Robinson, April 15, 1914, Robinson Papers.

prevalence of trachoma, tuberculosis, and other diseases, which threatened the destruction of whole tribes. Upon the commission's recommendation, Robinson introduced bills providing adequate hospitals, instruction in sanitation, establishment of schools, and the installation of the Yakima reclamation project. Though he was not successful in getting his bill passed, he brought these conditions to the attention of the Senate and set the stage for later legislation.

The Interstate Commerce Commission, since its creation in 1887, had grown to be one of the most important agencies of the Government but was definitely in need of reorganization. Senator Francis G. Newlands, chairman of the committee, tried to enlarge the commission for two years without success. At his request, Robinson took charge of the measure and introduced a bill which increased the commission from seven to nine members and authorized reorganization into three divisions to review cases and dispose of the work more rapidly. The Senate bill was amended on the floor and passed the House in substantially the same form.¹⁰

Robinson, as sub-committee chairman with Senators Albert B. Cummins and Charles E. Townsend, prepared the Federal Trade Commission Act which was designed to exercise a supervisory and regulatory power over corporations and industries engaged in interstate commerce and thus to protect the

¹⁰Cong. Rec., 64 Cong., 2 sess., February 19, 1917, p. 3608.

public against the evils of unfair competition. This act was passed simultaneously with the Clayton Antitrust Act and approved October 15, 1914. The commission was intrusted with the prevention of unlawful price discriminations, tying contracts, stock acquisitions in competing corporations, and interlocking directorates.

Some disagreement existed in the initial preparation of the bill, so Robinson remarked to Senator Cummins, "Dictate exactly how you would like to have the matter expressed; and if it is possible to do so, I will agree to it." Cummins dictated his version, and Robinson reported to the full committee on the following day. Upon reaching the controversial issue, Senator Cummins said, "But I cannot agree to that language!" Whereupon Robinson replied with great emphasis, "Well, Senator, you dictated it and if you can't be satisfied with your own language I presume our task is hopeless!"¹¹ Then after a careful reading, Cummins announced his acceptance of it. Later in 1927 the Senator was instrumental in securing the appointment of Chief Justice Edgar A. McCulloch of the Arkansas Supreme Court to the Federal Trade Commission.

During the war Robinson served even more diligently on the Interstate Commerce Committee as it faced the problem of congested railroad transportation and inadequate distribu-

¹¹Robinson to Elbert W. Harrington, April 22, 1937, Robinson Papers.

tion of freight cars. Goods piled up at eastern terminals without proper warehousing, and, consequently, the cars could not be released for a return trip. He favored a move to have railroads establish a board to allocate priorities for traffic over each line so that unjust discrimination would not result.¹² Since railroads had not kept pace with the country's needs by constructing sufficient freight cars, Senator Hoke Smith proposed the construction of \$100,000,000 worth of freight cars, but Robinson questioned the measure as a move toward government ownership of transportation.

Since he had helped draw up the measure providing federal operation of the railroads, the committee appointed Robinson to revise the original bill prepared by the director general of railroads. Robinson conferred with Secretary William G. McAdoo, Judge John Barton Payne, and Interstate Commerce Commissioner Chandler P. Anderson, who represented the administration.¹³ This bill regulated the length of time of federal control after the war and placed the authority to act on rate changes with the President rather than with the Interstate Commerce Commission. He formulated the provision that rates established by executive order were still subject

¹²Cong. Rec., 65 Cong., 1 sess., June 8, 1917, p. 3349.

¹³Robinson to James Madden, February 4, 1918, Robinson Papers.

to review by the Interstate Commerce Commission.¹⁴ He defended the bill against the attacks of James E. Watson of Indiana and Cummins of Iowa and argued that the railroads could not provide the necessary coordination, and that just compensation should be established upon the standard return based upon the average annual earnings for the three-year period ending June 30, 1917, including all revenues, expenses, and taxes.

Disagreement between the Senate and the House over the measure made it necessary for the Vice-President to appoint a joint conference to which Robinson was named. He drafted the measure accepted by the conference of the respective houses; the rate-making authority was left in the President's hands and the terminal date of federal railroad control was placed at twenty-one months after the war.¹⁵ The more efficient war operation of the country's railroad system later made Robinson a strong supporter of a movement to consolidate the main trunk lines, eliminate duplication of roads in areas of insufficient freight, and increase operating efficiency.¹⁶ This experiment in government control was a

¹⁴Cong. Rec., 65 Cong., 2 sess., February 22, 1918, p. 2509.

¹⁵New York Tribune, March 8, 1918, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁶Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 2 sess., December 19, 1919, pp. 862-63.

success in that it enabled the railroads to contribute more to the war effort than would have been possible under private management which was unregulated.

The Child Labor Law, written also by Robinson and Cummins, was a thorough revision of the House bill. It prevented the shipment in interstate commerce of goods manufactured in any plant employing child labor. Bitter opposition developed among Southern senators, but Robinson was able to clear the bill through the Senate in less than a week after its introduction. President Wilson personally and publicly thanked Robinson for his leadership in the passage of the measure.¹⁷

Robinson's attitude toward organized labor was not the typical attitude of the Southern states at this time. In election campaigns he often had the public support of labor unions as evidenced by their political advertisements during the campaign and state labor bulletins. The labor vote was not important in Arkansas but Robinson had more than a politician's interest in the matter and his views were generally

¹⁷Address delivered by Robinson in 1918. The House passed the measure February 2, 1916, but the Democratic caucus of the Senate decided to postpone consideration until the December session. In response to Wilson's demand that the measure be taken up, the Senate Democrats in caucus July 25, 1916, agreed to pass the measure that session, and Robinson reported the bill from committee August 3. The measure cleared the Senate 52 to 12. Commercial Financial Chronicle (New York), August 12, 1916, Robinson Clippings.

acceptable at a later period by Senator Robert Wagner of New York during the New Deal Period. While Robinson was friendly toward organized labor, he considered the public interest paramount to labor's contentions, particularly in the field of interstate transportation and commerce, and he stated his position:

The right of the individual to quit at any time for any reason that he chooses is recognized and preserved. . . . The regulation of commerce is a Government function; it is the duty of the Government of the United States to keep the channels of commerce open, and if it fails to do that the Nation can not live . . . there is no purpose on the part of anyone to deny to a laborer the right to quit work if he thinks the wage is not sufficient; but in our views of the matter he has no right to combine with other laborers to prevent commerce, and thus force the people of the country to recognize a demand which the Government or the people may regard as unjust.¹⁸

Robinson advocated the establishment of governmental tribunals with power to arbitrate between railway management and labor over wage differences and working conditions. He did not favor either management or labor and felt that strikes involving losses to the general public should be prohibited. These tribunals would exercise greater control than that which was provided under the National Labor Relations Board of the New Deal period:

. . . if [this bill] guarantees to these railroad employees fair, just, and reasonable wages paid in similar industries, the relation of wages to the cost of living, the hazards of the employment, the training and

¹⁸Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., September 4, 1919, pp. 4831-32.

skill required, the degree of responsibility exercised, labor will be greatly benefited and in no way imperiled. . . .¹⁹

Albert B. Cummins, Miles Poindexter, F. B. Kellogg, Atlee Pomerene, and Robinson were appointed Senate conferees, December 20, 1919, to reach a compromise on the Esch-Cummins Transportation Act which was finally reported back on February 21 and had been under consideration in both houses, for almost one year. Robinson observed that the conference report culminated "one of the most prolonged legislative contests in the history of Congress." Although the Esch bill of the House and the Cummins bill of the Senate were framed upon radically different theories, Robinson accepted the necessary compromises so that the measure might be enacted before the railroads returned to the control of private ownership on March 1, 1920.

The principal features of the compromise Esch-Cummins Act included a guaranteed wage maintenance for six months, a provision for the settlement of disputes arising from federal control, a refunding plan for railroads deeply in debt, a maximum allowable return rate of 5½ per cent on the aggregate value, and the settlement of labor disputes before a labor board appointed by the President. In opposition to union leaders, Robinson upheld the right of the individual

¹⁹Ibid., 66 Cong., 2 sess., December 19, 1919, pp. 891-92.

worker to appear before the board without being a member of the union, asserted that the government would not be controlled by labor organizations, and disagreed with labor leaders that the labor board would be unfriendly to labor's interest. Robinson noted two weaknesses in the conference bill: there was no method to enforce the decision of the labor board, and there was no penal provision written into the act.²⁰ He spoke of this act as a bill of rights for labor and in a later Congress claimed the responsibility for its conception and passage.²¹ Although Congress was organized under Republican leadership, Robinson played the chief role in the passage of the Esch-Cummins Transportation Act.

Senators William H. Calder of New York and Robinson were responsible for the passage of the daylight-saving bill in the Senate. Robinson as chairman reported the bill and secured its passage. It provided for advancing the clock one hour, beginning with the last Sunday in March and ending with the last Sunday in October of each year. First used in 1918, this measure probably saved approximately \$40,000,000 of electricity for industrial use. In October, 1918, Robinson introduced a bill making the daylight-saving act a permanent law as recommended by Bernard M. Baruch, chairman of

²⁰Ibid., February 23, 1920, p. 3334.

²¹Ibid., 68 Cong., 2 sess., March 2, 1925, p. 5125.

the War Industries Board.²² The measure passed the Senate but was not acted upon in the House.

President Wilson was elected by the people largely because of his stand on domestic issues, but like Thomas Jefferson he became more involved in foreign affairs as his administration progressed. Senator Robinson consistently supported Wilson's domestic legislation; and though he moved slowly at first, he eventually became an ardent defender of the President's foreign policy. He was well aware of the problems concerning the relations between the United States and Mexico when General Victoriano Huerta seized the Mexican government, but he made only brief comment upon the address the President gave before Congress warning all Americans to leave Mexico immediately. The Senator regretted the President's "do-nothing attitude" and his failure to take the public into his confidence.²³ However, in June, 1914, Robinson praised Wilson's restraint in refraining from armed intervention in Mexico.²⁴ This statement contrasted sharply with that of Senator William Borah, who claimed that no nation could retain its self-respect if it did not protect its citizens and the honor of its women "from being ravished and

²²Ibid., 65 Cong., 2 sess., October 10, 1918, p. 11168.

²³Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock); September 9, 1913.

²⁴Address, Delaware College, New Ark, Delaware, June 17, 1914, Robinson Papers.

murdered even upon . . . [their] very doorsteps."²⁵

Another involvement of foreign policy was the disagreement with Great Britain regarding tolls at the Panama Canal. The British believed that the United States had violated the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty by permitting American coastal vessels to be exempted from toll charges. Robinson expressed the widely-held opinion that the United States should be the sole judge in the matter since she had borne the cost of construction and maintenance and therefore had a right to the resulting benefits.²⁶ In the campaign of 1912 Wilson approved the exemption of American vessels from paying tolls but later felt that the nation's honor demanded the repeal of this provision.²⁷

As soon as it became evident that Wilson had changed his views, Senator Robinson shifted his position to support the President. In addressing the Arkansas State Democratic Convention, he said:

The administration has encountered criticism because of its policy in the repeal of the Panama Canal Tolls Exemption Act. The Panama Canal is the masterful triumph of the skill and enterprise of the American people. The administration believes that it is unfair to permit the

²⁵Conq. Rec., 63 Cong., 3 sess., January 13, 1915, p. 1502.

²⁶Address, Michigan State Bar Assn., Lansing, Michigan, July 19, 1913, Robinson Papers.

²⁷Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 91.

Shipping Trust to enjoy the benefits of free passage through the canal at the expense of the whole people. The Republican party hides its mistakes or supports them by appeal to selfish interests. The Democratic party frankly corrects its mistakes and justified its action by conforming economic wisdom and international comity; we shall repeal this provision which, in effect, is a subsidy to a trust.²⁸

After two months of bitter skirmishing, the advocates of the repeal of toll charges won easily. Link wrote, "It was a clear vindication of the principle of honor and decent dealing among nations, and it came about in spite of all that purveyors of prejudice and local patriots could do."²⁹

United States foreign relations became more strained after the beginning of World War I in Europe. Wilson's attempt to remain neutral during the first years of the war was staunchly supported by Senator Robinson, who publicly expressed opposition to the policies of the Allied and Central powers in their violation of neutral commerce upon the open seas. He held that Germany's destruction of unarmed enemy vessels and the expedient seizure of neutral ships was unsupported by precedent. He opposed an embargo on arms and believed that such action against Great Britain would constitute a violation of neutrality. When the sinking of the Lusitania on May 7, 1915, produced another crisis in German-

²⁸Address, Arkansas State Democratic Convention, c. 1914, Robinson Papers.

²⁹Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 93.

American relations, Robinson censured the newspapers for "maliciously and uncharitably printing what were not facts in an effort to establish the sympathies of the people upon one side or the other."³⁰ He declared:

In their eagerness to feed the morbid appetite of their readers for sensation, the newspapers throughout the United States anticipated the executive's action, by declaring that an extra session of Congress would be convened. This of course impaired the effect of President Wilson's demand for reparation and assurance that no similar act will be committed, and probably encouraged the Kaiser's diplomats to temporize by seeking to justify the destruction of the Lusitania as a vessel of war, armed and bearing contraband, and therefore subject to attack.³¹

Wilson was thus thwarted in his attempt to make a broad application of the principle of protection of human rights by restricting the use of mines, airships, and submarines against commercial shipping. Robinson called upon the nation to unite behind the man at the wheel and support Wilson who exemplified sober judgment and discretion of unselfish statesmanship. In defense of Wilson he said:

When the Lusitania went down, Ex-President Theodore Roosevelt impetuously declared for war. . . . The peace policy of the Administration was ridiculed by him as cowardly. . . . But when I contemplate the lives that it will cost, the burdens it will bring, the grief and sorrow it will cause . . . I thank Almighty God that we

³⁰Address, "The Peace Policy of the United States in the Present Clash of European Systems," c. June, 1915, and a similar speech delivered July 5, 1915, "The Efforts of the United States to Maintain the Rights of Neutrals During the Present European War," Robinson Papers.

³¹Ibid.

have a President who has not quickly yielded to the lust for blood, and who still toils and hopes and prays for peace.³²

Previously, the Senator had beseeched the belligerent nations to cease their attacks on neutral commerce and to clear up the confused status of contraband goods. He criticized England for its lengthy list which included many items used to feed and clothe civilians, and declared Germany's declaration of a twenty-mile war zone around the English ports a violation of international law. "We have protested," he said, "time and again but our protests have been unheeded," and then he continued:

The President has conducted the negotiations with commendable zeal and caution. No one rightminded desires that the United States shall become engaged in the war which is now desolating all Europe. We want peace with honor and I believe the means are at hand to induce both England and Germany to recede and conform to international law. . . . Our government must act with caution, yet firmness. Both England and Germany have transgressed the rights of neutral nations. Our grievance is against them both.³³

The torpedoing on August 19, 1915, of the British liner Arabic with a loss of two American lives brought an indignant censure from Wilson. So forceful was his stand that in the so-called Arabic pledge Germany promised to

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid., address, "Both England and Germany are Wrong in their Attacks on Neutral Commerce," August 14, 1915, Robinson Papers. For an excellent account of American neutrality, American diplomacy, and its preparedness program see Edwin Burchard and William P. Lage, Neutrality for the United States (New Haven, Connecticut, 1940).

refrain from attacking passenger ships. Wilson's remarkable diplomatic achievement gave the American people a false sense of security. Robinson believing that the crisis had passed said:

Germany has wisely yielded her contention that modern methods of warfare justify and make necessary the modification of those principles of international law fixed by the struggles and precedence of five centuries, forbidding the destruction of neutral vessels engaged in lawful commerce, or of enemy vessels without warning and visitation and safeguarding the lives of passengers and seamen. England will likely be compelled by the force of circumstances to recede from her erroneous position.³⁴

Another incident which added to President Wilson's stature as a leader was his handling of the Sussex affair. When Germany attacked the unarmed French channel steamer Sussex without warning and wounded a number of Americans, he sent an ultimatum which stated that unless the German government abandoned its relentless warfare against merchant and passenger ships, the United States would sever diplomatic relations. Germany agreed that hereafter submarines would observe the rules of visit and search before sinking merchant vessels.

Wilson's diplomatic victory in the Sussex affair once again gained for him undisputed control of party politics.³⁵ Once more the American people believed the President

³⁴Address in defense of the Wilson administration, Springfield, Missouri, October 30, 1915, Robinson Papers.

³⁵Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 233.

could really keep them out of war. On June 15, 1916, a wildly enthusiastic Democratic convention at St. Louis unanimously renominated Wilson for the presidency. A remarkable feature of the convention was the acceptance without great dissension by the delegates of the platform which Wilson wrote almost single-handed, incorporating suggestions made by Senators W. J. Stone, Henry F. Hollis, F. M. Simmons, O. W. Underwood, and T. J. Walsh. The slogan of the convention became, "He kept us out of war."³⁶ In addressing the convention, Robinson recounted the violations of neutral rights by both sides and observed:

"It is difficult to enforce rules, however, fair, in deadly combat. This applies to fights between individuals and to warfare as well. Combatants are quick to disregard rules founded on considerations of justice and mercy. . . . Ethical methods, the safety of bystanders and the rights of neutrals are forgotten."³⁷

He rejected England's interpretation of contraband goods and deplored her determination to prevent all commerce of neutral nations with the Central Powers. He said:

In doing this she has violated the law of nations and disregarded the rights of neutrals. Our Government has protested vigorously but England has adhered to her position. It is a part of her policy to "starve Germany." I can not find words to characterize appropriately this brutal attempt to win the war . . . by resorting to the inhuman expedient of visiting famine upon

³⁶Tumulty, Woodrow Wilson as I Know Him, 185.

³⁷Address, "Violation of Established Rules of Warfare by Belligerents," delivered before St. Louis Democratic Convention, Robinson Papers.

fifty million noncombatant men, women, and children.³⁸

He justified the mildness of the protests made by the United States to England on the ground that her violations related to the destruction of property while Germany's overt acts resulted in the destruction of American lives. The sinking of the Lusitania and the Ancona was stigmatized by Robinson as a "needless transgression" of American rights and an outrage upon civilization. He had little patience with an American citizen who traveled on belligerent ships when it could be avoided. He said:

Americans ought not to take the chances of thus involving their country in war and while I am unwilling to submit passively to such outrages, I will be slow to bring upon my country the indescribable calamities of participation in this horrible combat to avenge their deaths. However much we may sympathize with the Central Powers or with the Allies our sympathies should not lead us to unneutral acts.³⁹

Later, when Senator John D. Works of California stated that American protests lost much weight in his eyes because the government officials failed to warn American citizens not to travel on the Lusitania, Robinson, supported by Reed of Missouri, declared that the issuing of such a warning might constitute "an assertion of the doctrine that the right to so travel did not exist."⁴⁰ Before the Senate

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Cong. Rec., 64 Cong., 1 sess., January 5, 1916, p. 507.

in January, 1916, he declared his opposition to an embargo on arms and munitions to belligerents on the ground that such action might be taken against the United States should she become involved in a future war.⁴¹

Robinson had recognized in a speech before the Brooklyn Bar Association that the government's task of preserving neutrality was "constantly growing more difficult and complex."⁴²

He compared the Wilson administration to that of Lincoln for complexity of problems. He spoke of Wilson's supreme triumph in "the preservation of peace with honor in spite of the many vexing international disputes which have threatened to involve this nation in war." Robinson compared Wilson with Jefferson in his ability to maintain the commercial rights of neutrals and avoid participation in the struggle.⁴³

When Kaiser Wilhelm II realized that the strength of the Allied Powers depended upon supplies from the United States, the German Ambassador delivered a note to Secretary Lansing which revoked Germany's previous pledge and announced

⁴¹Ibid., January 27, 1916, p. 603.

⁴²Address, "The Latest Crisis in Our Diplomatic Relations," Brooklyn Bar Association, March 2, 1916, Robinson Papers.

⁴³Address, before the Democratic Organization of Newark, New Jersey, April 13, 1916, ibid.

the beginning of unrestricted submarine warfare, effective February 1, 1917.

That afternoon, as Robinson trudged homeward through the snow, a White House messenger overtook him and told him the President wished to see him immediately. The Senator and others who had been summoned saw a grim-faced leader who asked what he should do about diplomatic relations with Germany. Robinson replied in substance that he would give the German ambassador his passports and order him to leave the country.⁴⁴ Another senator suggested a further note of protest. Then they saw the President's jaws snap and his features become pale and rigid. Drawing himself erect and casting a stern glance upon his advisors Wilson said, "Let us be done with diplomatic notes. The hour to act has come. We scarcely can hope that Germany will recede. The German ambassador will be advised that unless immediate abandonment of the submarine policy is announced, his further presence in the United States is not desired."⁴⁵

Wilson appeared before Congress on February 3 and announced the severing of diplomatic relations with Germany. On February 26 he asked for the passage of the Armed Ship Bill. Senator Robert M. LaFollette under the Senate's rule

⁴⁴Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., February 8, 1924, p. 2651.

⁴⁵Ibid.

of unlimited debate organized ten senators to assist him in his filibuster to prevent passage of this measure. LaFollette's act enraged Robinson who had often protested any delay in the passage of legislation and had never engaged in a filibuster. On March 2, 1917 the Senate agreed to take up the Armed Ship Bill (S. 8322) but in spite of Robinson's protests the filibuster continued. It became apparent to Robinson and the administration forces that a prolonged debate would prevent passage of other essential legislation before the expiration of Congress. He visited the Senate cloakroom and offices during the night and secured 76 signatures to a statement which he read into the Record with much excitement and anger.⁴⁶ It stated:

The undersigned United States Senators favor the passage of S. 8322, to authorize the President of the United States to arm American merchant vessels and to protect American citizens in their peaceful pursuits upon the sea. A similar bill has already passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 403 to 13. Under the rules of the Senate allowing debate without limit it now appears to be impossible to obtain a vote prior to noon, March 4, 1917, when the session of Congress expires. We desire this statement entered in the Record to establish the fact that the Senate favors the legislation and would pass it if a vote could be had.⁴⁷

Later, all the Senators signed the Robinson round robin with the exception of twelve whom Wilson later designated as

⁴⁶Belle C. and Fola LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette (New York, 1953), I, 612.

⁴⁷Cong. Rec., 64 Cong., 2 sess., March 4, 1917, p. 4988.

"willful men" in obstructing the defense measures.⁴⁸

Senator Wesley L. Jones of Washington protested the reading of the statement in the Senate and its use in such a way as to reflect upon any senator who refused to sign it. This insinuation of bad faith infuriated Robinson whose voice rose to a thunderous roar in reply:

It does not come with good grace from the Senator from Washington, who has this evening charged the President of the United States with responsibility for the Lusitania incident, to rise on the floor of the United States Senate and, after subscribing his name to that document, to declare that he expected it to be kept secret and withheld from the records of the Senate when the document itself states it is made for the Record. Let men of courage rise now to speak. The hour has arrived when members of the U. S. Senate ought to be afforded an opportunity to say how they stand on this question. It is a fateful hour, an important issue, Senators.⁴⁹

During the early morning hours Senators Gilbert M. Hitchcock, Robinson, and others devised a plan to keep the Wisconsin Senator off the floor.⁵⁰ However, someone warned LaFollette; and about eight-thirty he entered the chamber to ask for recognition as soon as George W. Norris finished speaking. Senator Luke Lea was presiding and explained to LaFollette that the Vice-President had instructed him to

⁴⁸Charles Seymour (ed.), The Intimate Papers of Colonel House (New York, 1926), 237.

⁴⁹Cong. Rec., 64 Cong., 2 sess., March 4, 1917, p. 4989.

⁵⁰Beryl Erwin Pettus "The Senatorial Career of Joseph Taylor Robinson" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Illinois, 1952), 7.

recognize first Robert L. Owen and then Hitchcock. When Owen yielded the floor, presiding officer Willard Saulsbury recognized Hitchcock although LaFollette claimed to have been first on the floor. The latter, enraged over the incident, defied anyone to take him off his feet. At that moment several rushed up from the Democratic side. Robinson "leaped to his feet and stamped down the aisle . . . shouting his demands that his point of order be sustained, and that LaFollette be forced to his seat.⁵¹ With tempers high, these spirited solons argued the point at arms length, Saulsbury sustained Robinson's point of order; LaFollette appealed; Robinson moved to lay the appeal on the table, asking for yeas and nays, and was sustained 52 to 12. In the closing moments of the session Robinson served as presiding officer and unsuccessfully attempted to force a vote, even though Senator LaFollette threatened to toss a spittoon to attract his attention.⁵²

Immediately, upon the reconvening of the Senate in special session, a cloture rule enabling two-thirds of the Senate to force a vote was adopted. Later, on March 12, Wilson armed the American merchant vessels under the piracy

⁵¹LaFollette and LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, I, 621.

⁵²George W. Norris, Fighting Liberal: The Autobiography of George W. Norris (New York, 1945), 181.

statute of 1819.⁵³ Perhaps the chief significance of the Senate's action on the Armed Ship Bill lay in the fact that it led to the adoption of the Cloture rule, and thereby destroyed the effectiveness of the filibuster as a weapon to delay the consideration of war legislation in the Senate.

By March the patience of President Wilson and other national leaders was exhausted by Germany's sinkings of American merchantmen. On April 2, 1917, Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress and asked for a declaration of war against Germany. Robinson did not participate in the debate on the issue but read into the Record pro and con petitions over a declaration of war. After four days of debate, a war declaration passed Congress on April 6, 1917.

Wilson requested members of Congress to remain in office and not enter the service.⁵⁴ During the war Robinson served as a member of the Senate Steering Committee. In that capacity he enjoyed the intimate friendship of President Wilson, who regarded him as one of the administration's most loyal and efficient supporters in Congress.⁵⁵

His reasons for supporting the war were stated as

⁵³Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 274.

⁵⁴Cordell Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull (New York, 1948), I, 88-89.

⁵⁵"Washington Achievements," U. S. Press Association, n.d., Robinson Papers.

follows:

Of course, I abhor war and love peace, but after two years and a half of patient suffering, I have reached the conclusion that war with Germany sometime in the early future is inevitable. She has spent in the United States, within the last few months, more than \$200,000,000 in corrupting public sentiment and in the employment of spies, and in forming conspiracies for the destruction of American lives and property in this country. She has preempted more than a million and a half miles of the open sea, and without apology, ordered the United States to keep off of it. She has killed several hundred American men, women, and children, and has sought to incite Mexico and Japan to war against the United States, and for several months has been arming and mobilizing an army for that purpose not remote from our borders. She has attempted to terrorize the people of the United States by the use of dynamite and all the methods of the assassin. If she is triumphant in the present war, she will overcome the United States at its close. So it is fight now, or be destroyed hereafter. I think it is better to defend ourselves at present when there is no danger of a formidable invasion rather than wait, and single-handed, combat with this modern enemy of civilization and progress--the Imperial German Government. Germany has been making war on the United States for several months. Our Government has declared a state of war with Germany, and much as we regret it, we can not escape our duty.⁵⁶

Senator LaFollette became one of the most bitter antagonists of the war and often hindered the passage of war legislation. In a two-hour speech before the Senate on October 6, 1917, he claimed to be the nation's chief pacifist, demanded the right of free speech in wartime, and insisted upon the right and duty of Congress alone to determine the war objectives.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Robinson to F. J. Wills, April 11, 1917, ibid.

⁵⁷ St. Louis Republic, October 7, 1917, ibid., Robinson Clippings. LaFollette and LaFollette, Robert M. LaFollette, II, 783.

Robinson then gained the floor and, in language described as the "most unrestrained" ever heard in the Senate, accused LaFollette of insincerity in attacking the President and the war effort and in rejecting the rights of others to defend the war program, while he claimed the privilege of denouncing it. A hushed tenseness spread from the Senate floor to the galleries as Robinson turned toward LaFollette and shouted:

I say to you that I cannot find language within the rules of the Senate to appropriately characterize the sentiments uttered on this floor this morning by the Senator from Wisconsin. If I entertained those sentiments I would not think I had the right to retain a seat on the floor of the U. S. Senate. I would apply to the Kaiser for a seat in the Bundesrath.⁵⁸

Then the Arkansan denied that the United States had forced a war on Germany. He said that Germany planned for war against the United States.⁵⁹ He praised the loyalty of the American Negro and asserted that it would be far better to meet the Germans in Europe than to defend American soil against an invasion.⁶⁰ Shaking his fist and moving toward

⁵⁸Cong. Rec., 65 Cong., 1 sess., October 6, 1917, p. 7889. This same assertion that LaFollette would better serve as a member of the Reichstag was made by ex-President Theodore Roosevelt in Chicago, September, 1917. Chicago Daily Tribune, September 27, 1917, Robinson Clippings.

⁵⁹The Zimmerman note proved Germany encouraged Japan and Mexico to attack the U.S.; also much sabotage occurred at docks and manufacturing plants, Link, Woodrow Wilson and the Progressive Era, 1910-1917, 271-73.

⁶⁰Cong. Rec., 65 Cong., 1 sess., October 6, 1917, pp. 7888-90.

LaFollette, Robinson violated Senate decorum by addressing the pacifist directly:

There are only two sides to this conflict--Germanism and Americanism; the Kaiser or the President. I want to know where you stand. . . . The hour has come for loyal Americans to assert their manhood. We do not want any half-hearted support of this flag. You had the right to question the wisdom of the war, if in your honest judgment you doubted it, but when Congress passed the declaration of war, then, instead of remaining here . . . you went about the nation stirring up sedition, and gathering together the discontented elements of the country and seeking to inflame them against your flag, your country, and your President; by God, you ought to stand here and support the flag and the President and help bring victory to American arms.⁶¹

Senators of each party crowded about to shake his hand, and "strict enforcement rules prohibiting applause alone prevented the pent-up members and spectators from cheering."⁶²

The public press reported the event and generally praised Robinson, remarking that "not since the wrathful days of the Civil War had such an excoriation been delivered in the Senate." In describing the effect of the speech, the press commented:

So merciless was Senator Robinson's castigation, Senator LaFollette twice left the Senate floor, evidently unwilling or unable to hear the fearful denunciation of his attitude. The intense earnestness of the Arkansas statesman and his masterful oratory held the crowded galleries spellbound, while Democrats and Republicans

⁶¹Ibid., 7893.

⁶²St. Louis Republic, October 7, 1917, Robinson Clippings.

alike on the floor nodded approval of his sentiments.⁶³

The only major problem other than his legislative duties that required Senator Robinson's attention during the early months of 1918 was a decision to stand for re-election. He probably felt that the strain of an active campaign would be too much. He had tried two years previously to soothe the breach between Brundidge and himself by wiring a friend to "see Brundidge and in the strictest confidence find out if he will immediately accept from the President of the United States the position of minister to Uruguay at a salary of \$10,000 a year." Brundidge replied, "Wire the gentleman and tell him for me that I decline to be deported."⁶⁴ So the thorn in Robinson's side remained and as Brundidge had forewarned in 1913, he announced his candidacy for Robinson's seat in the Senate.

Senator Robinson let it be known that he was considering retirement from the Senate to accept a position as an editorial writer for a Chicago newspaper. President Wilson wrote Robinson an unsolicited letter urging him to stand for re-election. The letter was issued from the White House on February 6 but was not released until March when Robinson announced that he had reconsidered and would seek re-elec-

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Robinson to C. A. Yingling, telegram, September 5, 1916, Robinson Papers.

tion.⁶⁵

I have been distressed to hear that you were somewhat in doubt about seeking a re-election to the Senate. I hope with all my heart that there is no foundation for this impression. I should deem your retirement from the Senate a real national loss. My close and confidential association with you has taught me to value your counsel and your support in these trying times in a very unusual degree, and I am writing this as an earnest and friendly protest against any thought you may have had of retiring. This is a time when it is necessary that men who know each other's talents and principles and objects, and who feel themselves united in a common cause, would stand together not only, but keep together. I know that is your own thought and spirit, and it is because I have found your aid and counsel so exceedingly valuable that I am making this appeal to you.⁶⁶

This letter was carried by practically every county newspaper in Arkansas. The Wilson letter and evidence of Brundidge's waning political strength prompted Robinson's advisors to suggest that he remain in Washington⁶⁷ and leave the campaigning entirely to his friends in Little Rock. Mrs. Robinson was an excellent campaigner and was quite clever at sizing up the current situation.

The Liberty Loan Campaign was in full swing in Arkansas and its directors sought the Senator's services. For political and patriotic reasons, he accepted the invitation

⁶⁵Robinson to Earl U. Hardin, February 26, 1918, ibid.

⁶⁶Baker, Woodrow Wilson, Life and Letters, VII, 530.

⁶⁷President Wilson and McAdoo pledged their "unqualified support of the Administration" in behalf of Robinson. Robinson to W. T. Sitlington, editor, Arkansas Democrat, (Little Rock), February 18, 1918, Robinson Papers.

and obtained the famous Sousa Marine Band to accompany him on a ten-day bond drive. Brundidge realized his campaign had failed miserably and offered his services to the bond drive, too. When the board of directors asked Robinson's advice, he promptly told them to accept Brundidge's offer. This patriotic participation did not benefit him politically, for Robinson won by a decisive majority. The bitterness continued between them to such an extent that they did not even shake hands until 1937 at the funeral of John Martineau.

Upon his return to Washington, Robinson faced the task of fighting beside the President in the bitter and disastrous struggle in behalf of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations. Robinson's loyalty never wavered even when many of the Democratic Senators joined the camp of those opposing the President.

The prestige of the United States had never been so high in Europe as it was when the war drew to a close. When the German offensive was halted in July, 1918, by Foch's counter-offensive, the Germans realized that their defeat was imminent and asked for a truce to be followed by a peace based upon President Wilson's Fourteen Points. President Wilson received the requests of Germany and Austria and transmitted them to the Allied Governments, advising that an armistice be signed. The Allied Powers agreed, but insisted upon some modification of the Fourteen Points. This was the

first step toward a loss of influence in Europe by the United States. The position of the Americans was further weakened by the knowledge that the Congressional elections of 1918 had revealed a lack of united support behind the President at home, since the Republicans had gained a majority in the House and Senate despite the President's appeal for a Democratic Congress.

President Wilson decided to attend the Allied Peace Conference at Paris and arrived in France on December 13, 1918. Congressional Republican leadership was not willing for a Democratic President to negotiate a treaty without legislative direction. So much opposition was being voiced that President Wilson publicly requested the members of Congress to refrain from discussing the Versailles Treaty until after his conference with the House and Senate committees. Little attention was paid to the President's request. Senator Atlee Pomerene lauded the League of Nations as a great step in the advancement of civilization. William H. King claimed that the American people would never abandon the Monroe Doctrine for world responsibility advocated by the League. Borah attacked the League Covenant as "the greatest triumph for English diplomacy in three centuries."⁶⁸ Robinson contended that the proposed League was an "experi-

⁶⁸Thomas A. Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People (New York, 3rd edition, 1946), 660.

ment" in international relations.⁶⁹ Wilson returned to Washington and called his White House committee conference on February 26, but this meeting did not solve the problem. The Republican Round Robin of March 4, 1919, made it clear that the Republicans of the Senate wanted to negotiate the treaty as well as to ratify it. On May 23, 1919, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, majority leader and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, demanded that the President submit the preliminary treaty draft to the Senate before its final consummation at Paris. This the President refused to do.

Senator Robinson defended Wilson's position and reminded Lodge that he was inconsistent because he had upheld Theodore Roosevelt's position in 1906 when Roosevelt exercised the executive's sole power of treaty negotiation in the Russo-Japanese incident. Furthermore he labeled Lodge and Charles Curtis "partisan" because they had telegraphed Republican Senators not to make any public statement until after a party conference. He beseeched the Senators to forget partisanship and to express the will of the American people on the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations.⁷⁰

After five days of bitter denunciations of the League by Republican Senators and Democratic Senator James A. Reed

⁶⁹John Coleman Osborn, John Sharp Williams (Baton Rouge, 1943), 344.

⁷⁰Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., May 23, 1919, pp. 162-64.

of Missouri, Robinson made a strong appeal in the League's behalf. He argued that ratification would not limit the sovereignty of the United States. It was exceedingly regrettable, he said, that the Johnson Resolution of May 20 requesting a full text of the peace treaty from the President was discussed with such a "shameful display of partisanship." This attitude, he feared, might force the United States to withdraw from further treaty negotiations and prevent the establishment of a "logical and practical agency" to carry out the terms of the treaty. He described the attacks upon the President as bitter and unfair and charged that certain press statements were pure fabrications.

Robinson reasoned that Italy had no claim to Fiume on the basis that the secret treaties of 1915 were not apropos and that the League was adequate protection for France from German aggression. He charged that Senator Miles Poindexter had attacked the President unjustly by accusing him of aiding the communist movement. James M. Cox spoke of the Republican connivings as the "great conspiracy" perpetrated against the American people and directed by Senator Lodge who twisted and reversed his position of an earlier period in order to make "shambles of the League of Nations."⁷¹

After personal investigation and conferences with

⁷¹Cox, Journey Through My Years, 246-64.

the President, Robinson became convinced that the United States would stand condemned in the pages of history if it failed to support an organization that would make war improbable and that the League was the logical instrument to aid in the preservation of peace and the supervision of treaty obligations. He listed William H. Taft, George W. Wickersham, Elihu Root, and the American soldier as strong supporters of the League. His closing remarks were directed toward Senator Reed:

. . . I submit to the Senator from Missouri who declare^d that men in this Senate are supporting this treaty because a Democratic President brought it here, and that we would oppose it if a Republican President submitted it. His attitude toward the President of the United States, his attitude toward the issues presented in this body by his party, does not justify him in a wholesale denunciation of his colleagues on this side of the chamber.⁷²

President Wilson, in his message of July 10, 1919, asked the Senate and the American public to approve the Treaty of Versailles and the League of Nations. But Republican opposition under the direction of Senator Lodge proceeded to confuse the American public with unwarranted implication of hidden responsibilities. Wilson's uncompromising stubbornness played unwittingly into the hands of the Republican opposition and weakened the position of the League supporters.⁷³

⁷²Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., May 28, 1919, pp. 327-43.

⁷³John A. Garraty, Henry Cabot Lodge (New York, 1953), 357-401.

Republican opposition soared even higher over the controversial Shantung Affair which involved China's right to repossess the Shantung Peninsula from Japan. Under a treaty of 1898 China recognized German rights in the Shantung Peninsula; Japan claimed these same rights on the basis of occupation during World War I and by Japan's famous Twenty-One Demands forced upon China in 1915. At the Paris Conference, Wilson was forced to accept Japan's claims to the peninsula, which she promised to return to China as soon as feasible. While Borah called it the "most complete moral break-down in the history of treaty making,"⁷⁴ Norris claimed that this action of the Peace Conference violated "every principle of honesty and justice," betrayed a friendly nation, and turned over "innocent millions of people to the rule and control of their worst enemy."⁷⁵ Later, in August, Senator Borah commented again on the moral issue involved: "The Shantung affair is indefensible from any standpoint of morals or international justice or common decency. Naked, hideous, and revolting it looms up before us as a monster from that cruel and shameless world which all had hoped and prayed was forever behind us."⁷⁶

⁷⁴New York Times, June 29, 1919, Robinson Clippings.

⁷⁵Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., July 1, 1919, p. 2598.

⁷⁶Ibid., August 2, 1919, p. 4355.

Hearst's Chicago Herald-Examiner with its jingoism and sword-rattling policies headlined an editorial, "Sold - - - 40,000,000 People." Dr. Paul Reinsch, United States Minister to China, warned the government that China would not willingly submit to such an injustice.⁷⁷ Count Uchida, Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs, asserted that Japan succeeded to the rights of Germany in the peninsula and fully intended to return the territory as soon as she could ratify the treaty.⁷⁸

Senator Robinson's documented address on the legality of Japanese treaties with China was not challenged by the Senate opposition. In justifying Japanese possession as an inducement to enter the war on the Allied side, he said:

When the face of civilization was trembling in the balance, when Germany was using every power she possessed to induce Japan to make a secret treaty with her, a separate treaty of peace, a policy was pursued by Great Britain, France and the United States which cemented Japan to the cause of the Allies. I believed then and I still think that this policy was just, wise, and necessary.⁷⁹

Against an array of opposition, President Wilson and his Democratic supporters, with the exception of Thomas Gore and Reed, gallantly fought Frank B. Brandegee, LaFollette,

⁷⁷The Paris Peace Conference, Department of State Publication No. 1823 (Washington, 1942), II, 525.

⁷⁸Ibid., Department of State Publication No. 660 (Washington, 1934), I, 716.

⁷⁹Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., July 24, 1919, pp. 3086, 3089.

Norris, and Lodge who held that the Sino-Japanese treaties of 1915 were illegal because they were signed under duress. "If we go back into history and invalidate every treaty into which duress has entered, chaos in international relations will result," Robinson said.⁸⁰

The integrity of the Japanese government was a controversial issue in the Shantung question. American opinion was sharply divided, and the Senate opposition showed little respect for Japan's commitment to return the peninsula to China. Lodge noted that Japan never committed herself to a fixed date; Borah likened Japan's aggressiveness in China to her seizure of control in Korea. Sherman viewed each improvement in Shantung as an indication of permanent occupation;⁸¹ Norris never trusted Japan.⁸²

Ray Stannard Baker in a lengthy article in the New York Times took a stand similar to that of Robinson on the Shantung question. He recognized Japan's strong position at the Paris conference and defended Wilson. "No statesman," he said, "probably ever had a more difficult problem presented to him than Mr. Wilson upon these momentous April days of

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., 6878, 4351, 2725.

⁸²Norris, Fighting Liberal, 208. His distrust of Japan is clearly expressed in his chapter, "Defeat of the League," 202-13.

1919; and to form an accurate judgement upon the decision which followed, one must try to see the situation as a whole."⁸³

Wilson's efforts to push through the treaty had so far been futile. He invited groups of Senators to the White House to explain his point of view but these conferences also proved ineffective. Finally in desperation he decided to visit the states of the recalcitrant senators, and present his case to the people. On September 3, 1919, he began his tour of the Midwestern and Pacific states. His speeches were ineffective and his tour was probably a "disastrous blunder."⁸⁴ He was forced to abandon his campaign after the Pueblo address because of physical exhaustion and return to the White House. Without Wilson's active leadership in the closing months of 1919, the Democrats were unable to cope with the aggressive Republican majority. Senator Gilbert M. Hitchcock "had the responsibility of leadership without the actual authority to lead."⁸⁵

With the Senate organized by the opposition, the Democrats were thwarted in their efforts to ratify the treaty. Robinson showed anxiety over the trend of events in the post-war period:

⁸³New York Times, August 17, 1919, Robinson Clippings.

⁸⁴Thomas A. Bailey, Woodrow Wilson and the Great Betrayal (New York, 1945), 90.

⁸⁵Osborn, John Sharp Williams, 359.

Present and prospective conditions make the immediate future for the United States a more critical time than the period of actual fighting. While the Senate wrangles over details concerning the League of Nations, the spirit of unrest and of revolution grows throughout the Nation. While Senators repeat over and over arguments with which the country has become familiar, while we indulge in what we ought to know are vain attempts to change the views of our colleagues discontent increases.⁸⁶

Disturbed over the Senate resolution which would require the approval by three of the powers of Great Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, of any reservation adopted by the United States, Robinson felt that such action would needlessly arouse suspicion and ill-will:

In making a treaty of peace we ought not to fan smouldering embers of international prejudice. We ought not deliberately to invite suspicion and unfriendliness from other nations. We ought not to repel or incense our recent allies. We ought not to invite needless antagonism toward the United States. That is exactly what this reservation seems to me to accomplish. . . . It promises no useful or beneficial result; it will work harm and is a poorly concealed effort indirectly to accomplish what the avowed opponents of the treaty are unable to do, namely, to defeat the treaty.⁸⁷

Robinson supported the President with all his physical and mental resources. He believed that if Wilson had accepted the early reservations, the United States very likely would have ratified the treaty. But Wilson demanded that the treaty be accepted without material change or reservation. In 1924 Robinson commented that if Wilson's Fourteen

⁸⁶Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 1 sess., October 28, 1919, p. 7627.

⁸⁷Ibid., November 7, 1919, p. 8058.

Points had been written into the Versailles Treaty, Europe would have advanced "from chaos and disorder to lasting prosperity and progress."⁸⁸ "A final vote of 49 to 35 was reached on March 19, 1920. The treaty failed of ratification by seven votes less than the necessary constitutional majority. Only the southern Democratic Senators, as a group, followed the White House leadership."⁸⁹ To the last, Robinson voted consistently for Wilson's League of Nations and voted against the Lodge reservations. When Senator Knox offered a joint resolution to repeal the declaration of war against Germany of April 6, 1917, Robinson requested the Senate to adjourn, which it did on March 19, 1920, without taking action on the resolution.⁹⁰

Senator Robinson felt a sense of obligation toward the veterans. He had been making plans for the service men even before the war ended. He had insisted that each man be allowed the maximum of \$10,000 of war risk insurance. He wanted to extend protection to the family of a service man by covering him in case of injury or death while on furlough. Not satisfied with hospital facilities he introduced a resolution requesting an investigation of the number of hospital beds available. From the Surgeon General he learned of an

⁸⁸Ibid., 68 Cong., 1 sess., February 8, 1924, p. 2651.

⁸⁹Osborn, John Sharp Williams, 360.

⁹⁰Cong. Rec., 66 Cong., 2 sess., March 19, 1920, pp. 4600, 4604.

immediate need for 10,000 additional beds and an appropriation of \$30,000,000. Of 22,000 hospitalized patients in 1921, over half were in contract hospitals. He explained that at least one-half of the total number of the hospitalized are in flimsy buildings subject to fire or in buildings upon which the leases will expire within a very short time. He introduced an amendment to the Sundry Civil Appropriations bill of 1921 which would provide \$12,500,000 for construction of hospitals and the enlargement of existing facilities, but the economy-minded Carter Glass challenged the facts as presented by Robinson and the amendment was defeated.⁹¹

The years following the war brought the inevitable problems of reconstruction. The selection of candidates for the presidency found both parties somewhat at sea. Wilson was permanently ill and his influence was waning, and the Republicans had no outstanding candidate. The Republicans met in advance of the Democrats and selected Senator Warren G. Harding. Extending the usual Senatorial courtesy, Robinson commented upon Harding's selection: "He is one of the ablest and strongest Republicans in the Senate--a man with whom I have been intimately associated and one whom I highly esteem."⁹²

⁹¹Ibid., 66 Cong., 3 sess., February 7, 1921, p. 2728.

⁹²Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

Robinson was selected to serve as permanent chairman of the 1920 Democratic convention which opened June 28 at the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco. Temporary Chairman Homer S. Cummings gave the keynote address in which he attacked the Republican platform as "reactionary and provincial," reviewed the Democratic progressive legislation, and condemned the Republican party for the defeat of the League.⁹³

Robinson was escorted to the rostrum and gave an address that "became a valued campaign document."⁹⁴ He ripped into the Republican platform, calling it "an astonishing and amazing jumble of inconsistencies, ambiguities, evasions, misrepresentations, straddles, and slanders." He pointed to the insincerity of the Republican plank on taxes because it denounced the fiscal policy of the Democratic party but did not pledge a reduction of taxes. The Republicans, he said, did not mention their usual prosperity plank, for the people were enjoying an era of unparalleled prosperity during a Democratic administration. Robinson denied that the care of disabled veterans was a mere gratuity as implied in the Chicago Republican platform but felt that it was a reasonable and just obligation of the Federal government. He accused the Republican party of partisanship and obstructive action

⁹³Edward G. Hoffman (comp.), Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, San Francisco, 1920 (Indianapolis, 1920), 8-26.

⁹⁴Cox, Journey Through My Years, 228.

in blocking Wilson's foreign policy.

Robinson defended the Wilson version of the Versailles Treaty, and upheld Article X as necessary to prevent war. Many Democratic Senators, he said, voted against the Lodge reservations because they "believe that those reservations cut the heart out of the League and made it improbable that the League could accomplish the very purpose for which it was being created."⁹⁵ League members pledged themselves to arbitrate all justifiable questions, reduce armament to League standards, and apply commercial boycotts to check aggression. His remarks on the Senate and League were pertinent: "It is to the shame of the Senate that it consumed a greater length of time in defeating the treaty than our Army and Navy took to win the war." Robinson maintained that Wilson and the Senate Democratic leaders made every effort to compromise and retain the necessary machinery of the League: "At one time a compromise was practically effected, which would have resulted in the ratification of the treaty. But the irreconcilables attracted the attention of Senator Lodge and he would agree to nothing." Robinson closed his address by calling upon the American woman and the American veteran to stand for peace and to oppose war by supporting the Democratic party.⁹⁶

⁹⁵Hoffman, Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, San Francisco, 1920, 80.

⁹⁶Ibid., 83.

Although Robinson's speech was similar to that of Homer Cummings, it had more color and force. The delegates screamed with delight as Robinson verbally fought the war and the Washington battles all over again, saying, "Talk of the Senate, in that body we have what is known as the 'rule of unlimited debate,' which means that when any senator gets the floor he may talk just as long as he pleases on any subject that he chooses, and nobody but God can stop him, and the Lord never seems cognizant of him."⁹⁷

After finishing his speech, Robinson was frustrated by convention hecklers who were boisterous, factional, and difficult to control. But eventually the convention quieted down as he pounded his gavel so hard that it sounded like a pile driver going full blast, and caused glasses "to shimmy" on the table.⁹⁸ The party platform was presented and approved on the following day. Wilson was happy over the League plank; and organized labor was satisfied over the party's stand on labor.

Of the ten nominated candidates, William G. McAdoo, Governor James M. Cox, ex-Attorney-General A. Mitchell Palmer, Homer Cummings, Senator Robert L. Owen, Governor Alfred E. Smith, and Senator Carter Glass seemed to be the best known. McAdoo led on the earlier ballot, but Tammany

⁹⁷Ibid., 82.

⁹⁸Newsclipping, July 1, 1920, Robinson Clippings.

shifted its support to Cox. With so many active candidates, one correspondent observed, "I have been in politics for thirty years and attended many conventions during that period, but I have never seen such a grasshopper convention as this. With the exception of six or seven states the delegates are jumping around like fleas."⁹⁹

McAdoo enjoyed the support of the Wilson administration but not that of William Jennings Bryan. It was "interesting to see Bryan and Tammany linked together in a common cause in supporting Governor Cox."¹⁰⁰ After forty-four ballots, Cox was acclaimed unanimously. Franklin D. Roosevelt was selected as Cox's running mate without the formality of a single ballot. Robinson was appointed chairman of the committee to notify the Honorable James M. Cox of his nomination for President. The convention adjourned on July 6, 1920.

The Democratic defeat in the 1920 November election was attributed by Robinson to "restraints imposed on industry and commerce by the Government during the war and continued after the necessity for them apparently had passed."¹⁰¹ Historians point to several other issues, including prohibition, unemployment, strikes, high prices, corruption, and

⁹⁹E. H. Moore, The Outlook, CXXV (July 14, 1920), 488.

¹⁰⁰Washington Post, June 30, 1920, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰¹Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., September 15, 1919, p. 12669.

lack of any clear-cut choice between the Democratic and Republican party on the League issue. "The Americans of 1920 were tired of excitement, disillusioned by the failure of the war to produce a new and better world, eager to escape from the responsibilities of internationalism."¹⁰²

Robinson was aware, too, of some permanent changes brought about by the war. The Federal government exercised greater control over production and distribution than it had prior to 1914. The Federal tax system was revolutionary in its application to income. Labor was making strides toward higher standards for the working man. He detected a wave of racial equality that came after the war and deplored the loss of thousands of teachers who entered military, government and defense work at higher salaries during the war.¹⁰³

The war and the tension caused by so much opposition to his leadership as President had disheartened Wilson. He fought for his convictions even though his health was broken. In 1922, he urged Robinson to continue his service in the Senate, for he considered him "the moral and intellectual leader of the Senate." In February, 1924, when Wilson died, Robinson commemorated his great leadership with the following eulogy:

¹⁰²Garraty, Henry Cabot Lodge: A Biography, 400-01.

¹⁰³Address, n.d., Robinson Papers.

His unconquerable will remained and served him to the end. . . . He could not restrain indignation at the weak and indefinite foreign policy of his successor. . . . Had he regained his health sufficiently to present and urge his views respecting policies, it seems quite likely that the verdict alleged to have been returned against him in 1920 might have been reversed. . . . In that eternity of fame where only master spirits abide let him be remembered for his service to his fellow men, for after all this is God's test when He permits creatures to exchange mortality for immortality.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁴Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., February 18, 1924, p. 2652.

CHAPTER VI

THE HARDING AND COOLIDGE ADMINISTRATIONS

The defeat of the Democratic party in the Presidential election of 1920 was a disappointment to Robinson but by no means a surprise. His next move was to strengthen the Democratic Senate minority by making it harmonious in order to oppose effectively any undesirable legislation brought up at the extra session by President Harding.

The Knox Resolution, approved by Senator Lodge's committee, aroused Robinson's opposition because it recognized a state of peace with Germany simply by repealing the joint declaration of war of April 6, 1917. He asserted that this action was outrageous because it questioned the propriety of declaring war in the beginning. Also, it raised points of legality over veterans' rights, benefits, and war contracts. On April 28, 1921, angered by an action so unprecedented, he asked: "What is the legal effect of repealing the act under which thousands of American soldiers went to battle and to death, and thousands more went to irreparable injury, and under which billions of dollars were ex-

pendent?"¹ In a speech two days later, he faced Lodge with the charge: "You are doing a futile, feeble, and foolish thing, in my opinion, when you repeal the resolution declaring the existence of a state of war after the war has ended."² Robinson and most of the Democrats voted against Joint Resolution No. 16 even though they had been effective in changing the wording to simply declare the war at an end. However, the resolution passed 38 to 19 on July 1, 1921.³

The factor of national armament was still a problem in the international field. Secretary Hughes asked the major powers to attend the Washington Naval Conference and proposed significant limitations in the construction of battleships. Negotiations were also completed to replace the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of 1902 with a Four Power Treaty consisting of the United States, Great Britain, France, and Japan. This pact provided for mutual respect of each other's rights in the Pacific and reference of future disputes in that area to a joint conference. A threat by any other power to the rights of the signatory powers would bring forth joint or separate action "to meet the exigencies of the particular situation."⁴

¹Conq. Rec., 67 Cong., 1 sess., April 28, 1921, p. 797.

²Ibid., April 30, 1921, p. 839.

³Ibid., July 1, 1921, p. 3299.

⁴Bailey, A Diplomatic History of the American People, 695.

The attitude of Senator Henry C. Lodge toward the Four Power Treaty differed radically from his attitude toward the Versailles Treaty. Lodge wanted to place the Four Power Treaty in operation as soon as possible without careful consideration. From December 12, 1921, to March 24, 1922, Robinson's continuous attack against the treaty won the confidence of his fellow Democrats. His first inquiry into the origin of the treaty "created a field-day of debate which kept the Senate floor in a turmoil all afternoon."⁵ He stated, "We don't know and will never find out from any authentic source who wrote the first draft."⁶ His own conclusions were that Mr. Balfour conceived, and Prince Togugawa of Japan wrote the treaty.

Robinson introduced one amendment that pledged the four signatory powers against secret diplomacy. Another amendment provided that the four powers should refrain from aggression against nonsignatory as well as signatory nations, and that all other interested nations should be invited to any conference over a Pacific controversy.⁷ However, his amendments were decisively defeated.⁸

⁵Louisville Courier Journal, March 10, 1922, Robinson Clippings.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), March 18, 1922.

⁸New York World, March 18, 1922, editorially supported Robinson's amendments, Robinson Clippings.

As to the relinquishment of the right of the United States to fortify the Pacific Island possessions, Robinson asserted: "I am willing to go as far as any Senator will go for disarmament. I am not willing now and shall not be at any other time to place the possessions of the United States at the mercy of any foreign power."⁹ He noted that the conference reported a supplementary treaty explaining the provisions of the treaty relative to the Japanese mainland. He then shot this barbed question: "In view of the course which the matter has taken, does the Senator think that the meaning of the treaty is entirely clear?"¹⁰

Earlier in the debate, he expressed concern over Russia's attitude toward the Four Power Treaty because she had not been considered as a recognized power in solving the problems of the Far East.¹¹ Further, Robinson believed that under this treaty the United States agreed to Japan's basic policy on immigration and economic penetration of Manchuria, Mongolia, Shantung, and Siberia. The Senator felt that in sanctioning this policy the United States would be abandoning its foreign policy of friendliness toward Russia and China. He made a premonitory evaluation of the treaty: "The net

⁹Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., March 9, 1922, p. 3611.

¹⁰Ibid., March 14, 1922, p. 3841.

¹¹Ibid., March 9, 1922, p. 3610.

result of this treaty as it is written is that Japan will dominate the Pacific Ocean and dominate the Asiatic Mainland."¹² He further stated that the Senate must place its own interpretation upon the treaty and must not rely upon the two Senators who represented them at the disarmament conference.¹³

Senator Robinson's delaying tactics had the support of isolationists Borah and Johnson who had been bitter opponents of the Versailles Treaty, and his effective leadership was recognized in many quarters:

From day to day, on the Senate floor, Arkansas' senator has been the most tireless and resourceful antagonist of secret diplomacy, British dictation and Japanese chicanery, as they have cropped out of the four-power pact, the most feared of all those who have had the courage to raise their voices against the well-laid plans of the Lodge steamroller.¹⁴

To the final vote, Robinson led the opposition to the treaty. The treaty was, nevertheless, ratified by the necessary two-thirds vote, 67 to 27, on March 24, 1922.¹⁵

The Arkansan made no official statement on the Naval Limitations Treaty or Five Power Pact agreeing on the limitation of capital ships nor on the Nine Power Treaty effecting

¹²Ibid., March 23, 1922, p. 4324.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), editorial, March 21, 1922.

¹⁵Foster R. Dulles, America's Rise to World Power, 1898-1954 (New York, 1954), 150-51.

the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of China. The first measure was approved 74 to 1 on March 29, 1922, and the second measure cleared 66 to 0 on March 30. In each case Robinson was absent, but he requested his colleague to state that had he been present he would have supported both measures.¹⁶

The debate on the Treaty actually set off the battle for Senatorial control of the Democratic party. On March 11, Robinson fought a lengthy verbal duel with Democratic Leader Underwood. This was the turning point in the career of each man: one to retire shortly, the other to become Democratic leader in the Senate. When Underwood denied that this was a binding alliance upon the United States, Robinson analyzed the treaty articles one by one to prove that it was considered an effective alliance. Underwood's statements lacked factual knowledge and his leadership faded before the cross-fire of Robinson, Reed, and Glass.

The leaders of the two factions, were in marked contrast. Underwood, suave, urbane, and debonair, had trouble holding his colleagues in line. Some considered him too conservative, too friendly, and too popular with the Republicans. But rough-hewed Robinson was a "no quarter" fighter. Tireless, resourceful, and physically powerful, he commanded

¹⁶Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., March 29, 1922, p. 4718; March 30, 1922, p. 4784.

respect; he did not bow to the Republican majority.¹⁷ He served as one of Underwood's principal floor lieutenants prior to the debate on the treaties arising from the Washington Conference, and was considered one of the ablest parliamentarians in the Senate.¹⁸

In December, 1922, Underwood announced his intention to retire from the Senate at the end of the present Congress, March 4, 1923. The contest for his position lay between Robinson and Senator F. M. Simmons of North Carolina, the ranking Democrat in the Senate. Angus McLean of North Carolina organized the Simmons forces, while Robinson had the active support of Thomas J. Walsh of Montana, Key Pittman of Nevada, and some of the more progressively minded senators.¹⁹ Bernard Baruch and Senators Pat Harrison and John Sharp Williams wrote letters endorsing Robinson.

Robinson's most laudatory letter was penned by a close friend, Mississippi's Senator John Sharp Williams, who had recently announced his retirement:

I served with Joe Robinson in the House of Representatives several terms and he has been in the Senate throughout most of my service in that body. I like him because he was a good Wilsonian Democrat, . . . stood like a good soldier because he wanted to stand and because, like me, he loved Wilson's character and admired

¹⁷Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), March 21, 1922.

¹⁸New York Times, February 9, 1923, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁹Robinson to Senator C. C. Dill, December 15, 1922 Robinson Papers; Washington Herald, December 12, 1922, Robinson Clippings.

his vision. I understand the race is reduced to two candidates, Senator Simmons of North Carolina being the other one. I have nothing against Senator Simmons personally or politically, but somehow he does not appeal to my heart like Joe Robinson does. Robinson's opposers say that he sometimes loses his temper and I am afraid that is true, and when a man loses his temper he generally loses his head . . . but in all his long service in the House and the Senate, I never knew him to neglect or forget parliamentary proprieties.

The chief thing I wish to say is that he is a Democrat--in favor of equal opportunities--opposed to special privileges--so fundamentally Democratic by instinct he would nearly always go right. He also possesses that personal loyalty and sense of obligation which is an earmark of a man of heart and courage.²⁰

By the last of January, 1923, Robinson wrote that a majority of all members of the next Democratic Senate conference were committed to him and that he could not shirk this opportunity of service.²¹ Senator Overman announced the withdrawal of Senator Simmons from the race because of ill health.²²

Friends of Robinson were happy over the event; even William G. McAdoo, an admirer of Simmons, congratulated Robinson:

I am very much gratified to learn that the contest over the leadership of the Senate has been averted and

²⁰John Sharpe Williams to Senator Woodbridge N. Ferris, December 13, 1922, Robinson Papers.

²¹Robinson to B. M. Baruch, December 13, 1922, ibid. Robinson included a formal salutation in a letter rather than the usual "Dear Bernie," to which Baruch replied, "Is this the first sign of your coming leadership? If it is, I am agin you," Baruch to Robinson, December 15, 1922, ibid.

²²Washington Herald, February 9, 1923, Robinson Clippings.

that everything has been satisfactorily arranged so that you are to become the party leader with everybody behind you. This gives you a great opportunity and I know that you will be equal to it. . . . I think you and I are both agreed that a militant, and not a static, democracy is essential to the country; I know that you will furnish the militant leadership that is so needed in the present emergency. . . . It seems that you enter upon the leadership under the most favorable conditions and auspices, and it must gratify you immensely to find that your colleagues are unanimously behind you and there is no note of inharmony arising out of the friendly rivalry which proceeded for a time between you and Senator Simmons. . . .²³

Robinson spent the summer of 1923 sampling the opinions of prominent Democrats so that party policies of the Senate might reflect the views of the majority of Democrats and present a solid front in the next session of Congress.²⁴

The unforeseen event of the late summer was the sudden death in San Francisco of President Harding on August 2,²⁵ while on a tour to the West Coast and Alaska. This event shocked the nation. Senator Robinson returned to resume his duties, aware of difficulties arising from a change of administration, for even the Republicans were unable to anticipate the attitude of President Coolidge toward the issues of the day.

Robinson took control of the Democratic Senate

²³William G. McAdoo to Robinson, February 21, 1923, Robinson Papers.

²⁴Robinson to William G. McAdoo, March 7, 1923, ibid.

²⁵Claude M. Feuss, Calvin Coolidge: The Man from Vermont (Boston, 1940), 304-05.

leadership on December 3, 1923, and defined his leadership in a statement of intention to C. P. J. Mooney, editor of the Memphis Commercial Appeal: "My aim is to organize in the Senate on the Democratic side a fighting force which will become familiar with all important public issues coming before the Senate, and present insofar as possible the Democratic viewpoint."²⁶

At the Copenhagen Conference, in 1923, Robinson supported the Harding administration on the controversial issue of reparations and Allied debts. Great Britain's Lord Wear-dale presented a resolution linking the repayment of allied debts and reparations. After studying the matter, Robinson clearly expressed the American position:

. . . Inter-Allied debts are contractual obligations and relate to liquidated sums to be adjusted by friends insofar as time and terms of payment are concerned; whereas reparations are in the nature of damages or penalties forcefully exacted by a victor from a defeated enemy.

.
We are unwilling to have imposed upon the United States . . . any responsibility for the solution of the vexing questions relating to reparations. Our interest in the subject of reparations is not that the United States shall receive reimbursement for the loss which her commerce and her population experienced during the late great war, but that the economic conditions of Europe may be stabilized, and that peace may come again to bless the world; and we do not feel that we have the right . . . to impose upon nations directly interested the policy and views of the United States.²⁷

²⁶Robinson to C. P. J. Mooney, February 17, 1923, Robinson Papers.

²⁷Robinson, "Reparations and Inter-Allied Debts," Proceedings of the XXI Inter-Parliamentary Conference (Copenhagen, August 15-17, 1923; Geneva, 1924), 19-20.

British debt cancellation and adjustment with her allies was actively opposed by Robinson and Reed. The Balfour note refusing a compromise to Britain's debtors because the United States refused to reduce the British war debt was branded as an insolent attempt to isolate this country from her former allies. Robinson opposed the readjustment of the British war debt on the basis that the rates of interest were too low and the period of repayment too long. However, by spring of 1923, Robinson was supporting the Republican policy on the British debt settlement:

I think it would have been unfortunate for our party, as well as for the country, if the Democrats had made a political issue of the subject and had opposed the bill. As a matter of fact, it was not only in the main a fair settlement, but its rejection by the Congress would have been harmful to our own interests, as well as to those of Great Britain and the world at large.²⁸

Robinson could not understand why the Harding administration would delay in pressing claims against Germany. He advocated using the proceeds from the sale of German property held in trust by the federal government to pay claims of American citizens against Germany, believing that such claims would never be collected from the German government.²⁹ Baruch and Robinson agreed that the French debt should be reduced as soon as possible, even though American soldiers

²⁸Robinson to W. G. McAdoo, March 7, 1923, Robinson Papers.

²⁹Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., January 4, 1922, p. 746, July 24, 1922, pp. 10581, 10585.

resented French propaganda urging a cancellation of the debt.³⁰ This made it difficult for M. Caillaux and his associates to work out satisfactory arrangements.³¹ Even with a considerable reduction, the Europeans characterized America as avaricious and oppressive.

In March, 1926, Robinson opposed the Italian debt reduction and extended period of repayment as presented by Senator Reed Smoot of the Finance Committee. The American people, he declared, were not Shylocks, but had a right to refuse cancellation of war debts. His counter proposal was a fifty per cent reduction of the United States protective tariff rates which would double Italy's ability to pay. But the administration with the support of Andrew H. Mellon passed the measure in the Senate with most of the Democrats and a sprinkling of Progressives opposing it.³²

Economic and political security of Europe was threatened by the creation of anti-German pacts and the war-like boastings of Mussolini. Robinson was not sure whether a

³⁰Herbert Hoover, as a member of the World War Foreign Debt Commission, indicated obvious desire by allies to default purposely upon debts owed the United States. Further, he did not think the payments excessive. The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933 (New York, 1952), 177-79.

³¹Robinson to D. M. Boyle, September 29, 1925, Robinson Papers.

³²Cong. Rec., 69 Cong., 1 sess., April 26, 1926, p. 7902.

lenient policy of debt readjustment would lead to political and economic stability or to imperialism and aggression, but felt that the Geneva Disarmament Conference would measure Europe's good intentions to reduce armaments and military expenses. The Senator prophesied that a full explanation of American foreign policy would convince indebted governments of the futility of their demand to cancel their obligations as the price of their esteem.³³

Robinson was never a flag-waver or a super-patriot. He lent his support to allaying animosities and calming national passions during periods of great emotional stress. This was particularly true in 1927 when Mexico confiscated American property and oil lands. Robinson believed:

. . . If our Government for the third time in recent years sends its armed forces into Mexico, it will create throughout the Western Hemisphere secret and open schools in which hatred for my flag and yours will be taught to those with whom we should be friendly. It means that alliances will be formed which will endanger or destroy American commerce with Central and Southern American states.³⁴

Robinson's contribution to American foreign policy was greatly influenced by his travels.³⁵ He attended the

³³Address, "Notable Post-Armistice Problems and Conditions," Conway, Arkansas, November 11, 1926, Robinson Papers.

³⁴Cong. Rec., 69 Cong., 2 sess., January 25, 1927, p. 2203.

³⁵Chicago Tribune, August 3, 1923, Robinson Clippings.

Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings in Stockholm in 1921, Copenhagen and Geneva, in 1923, and Istanbul in 1934. He attended a world trade conference in Rio de Janiero in 1927 and that year was also sent as a goodwill ambassador to Argentina and Chile.

He held a balanced point of view--being both an internationalist and a nationalist in his outlook--and supported an international armament limitation and strong national defense. He considered the Four Power Pact a failure. He doubted the value of the Five Power Pact which limited the ships and naval bases of Great Britain, United States, France, Japan, and Italy. The Harding administration, in his opinion, sadly lacked a foreign policy of any consequence.³⁶

Robinson's greatest efforts lay in the field of domestic legislation. The turbulent industrial readjustment following World War I was indicated by the railway and coal strikes of 1922, which menaced the prosperity of the country. In the following excerpt from an address, Robinson expressed his views on labor organizations:

. . . Public sentiment in the United States . . . uncompromisingly favors preserving both personal liberty and private property. Labor organizations must recognize government authority as supreme. . . . Persons or organizations which advocate force, anarchy, direct

³⁶Robinson to William Seaver Woods, editor of The Literary Digest, March 6, 1923, Robinson Papers.

action, or the resort to sabotage to accomplish their purposes, must be outlawed. There is no room in this country for the I. W. W. or kindred associations which seek to destroy American institutions.³⁷

The causes of the industrial unrest from Robinson's viewpoint were emotional excitement caused by the war; labor's contention that unjust differences prevailed between the cost of living and current wages; discontent prompted by labor propaganda; and confusion and uncertainty resulting from the failure of the Senate to ratify the Treaty of Versailles. His first remedy was a revival of patriotism to intensify loyalty to America's institutions.³⁸

Robinson believed a governmental tribunal representing the public as well as management and labor should be established. The Railroad Labor Board was facing the supreme test of surviving or being discredited as a useless adjunct of Government.³⁹ Although distinctly unsympathetic toward any plan for government operation of railroads, Robinson was still working on a plan for a practical method of adjusting railway strikes.

In September, 1922, Attorney-General Harry M. Daugherty requested Federal Judge Wilkerson of Chicago to grant an injunction restraining strikers and sympathizers from

³⁷Address, n.d., ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Robinson to Dr. J. H. Miller, July 19, 1922, ibid.

interfering with railroad operation and destroying railroad property. It also declared peaceful conferences, assemblies and entreaties of the laborers unlawful. Robinson contended that such gatherings could not be legally enjoined, and he led the attack in the Senate against the injunction on September 6. He warned President Harding and Attorney-General Daugherty that they could pursue no quicker way of undermining the government than by using government military and naval forces to break up strikes. He deemed Daugherty's action a violation of the anti-injunction provision of the Clayton Anti-Trust Act. He declared lawless courts represented anarchy, and he held that the real foes of the Constitution were those who "winked at the exercise of unlawful authority."⁴⁰ Robinson's constituents accused him of defending the union which, they asserted, suppressed free speech through fear.

Another phase of the railroad question in which Robinson was interested was of local origin. The Missouri and North Arkansas Railroad had suspended operations. Robinson sponsored its reorganization in 1922 so that 10,000 square miles of Arkansas were no longer paralyzed.⁴¹

⁴⁰Los Angeles Evening Herald, September 26, 1922, Robinson Clippings; Robinson to Harry N. Bell of the Texarkian (Arkansas), September 22, 1922; and Robinson to E. J. Hampton, September 18, 1922, Robinson Papers.

⁴¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 14, 1922.

Robinson protested the surcharge added to Pullman fares in 1920, and introduced a measure to force the railroads to rescind the increase. He asserted that sleeping cars were no more a luxury than hotels and restaurants,⁴² and that the surcharge was an additional transportation cost, unjust, unnecessary, and unreasonable. He warned the railroad executives, "This diversion of traffic from railroads to automobiles and . . . trucks is a policy that is growing, and the railroads can only counteract it by doing something to invite and encourage the public to use their instrumentalities."⁴³ The measure twice cleared the Senate but was pigeon-holed in the House Committee on Interstate Commerce. When it finally came to a vote, it was defeated by the powerful railroad lobby.

The Railway Disputes Act of 1926 was opposed by Robinson because it provided neither for public representation on the arbitration board nor for continued operation of railways during the period of negotiation. Robinson wanted legislation binding management and unions to continue operation; he foresaw the limitations of the act which later developed in the April strike of 1926. He predicted:

⁴²Addresses, Southern Commercial Traveler's Association, New York, February 4, 1922; Bigger and Better Business Dinner of the Associate Division of the National Council of Traveling Salesmen's Associations, New York, April 15, 1926, Robinson Papers.

⁴³Cong. Rec., 67 Cong. 2 sess., January 18, 1922, p. 1333.

. . . [This bill] is going to pass by an overwhelming majority. . . . Both the railroads and the laborers want the bill; it represents the result of conferences extending over a very long period; but I do not think the measure represents a substantial step forward or that it will in the long run prove of great value either to the railroads or to their employees, and I am certain that it will not be helpful to the public.⁴⁴

The coal strike occurring in the same year as the railway strike also caused Robinson deep concern. On June 8, 1922, he and Senator Walsh protested the action of Secretary of Commerce Hoover, who arbitrated a price agreement on coal between operators and laborers. Robinson opposed arbitrary price fixing believing that such a power would control the life or death of the commodity.⁴⁵ Though he deplored the lengthy strike that crippled industry and left thousands of homes cold, he opposed Senator Borah's bill providing for the United States Coal Commission, because he felt it should include representatives from both management and workers.⁴⁶

Another coal strike in 1926 brought objections from Robinson who made this statement:

This country can not be dependent always upon the whim or caprice of the men who own mines or of the men who work in the mines. The latter have a perfect right to quit work, of course, but they have no right to combine . . . to prevent the operation of the mines, to prevent others from working who are willing to work, to prevent owners from operating their mines who are willing to operate their mines, and thus bring misery, if not

⁴⁴Ibid., 69 Cong., 1 sess., May 11, 1926, p. 9206.

⁴⁵Ibid., 67 Cong., 2 sess., June 8, 1922, p. 8374.

⁴⁶Ibid., August 25, 1922, p. 11773.

death to thousands of people.⁴⁷

Another perennial issue during the 1920's was the bonus bill for the soldiers of World War I. When it appeared that the measure would be brought to a vote, President Harding came before the Senate on July 12, 1921, to ask that it be set aside. This was the first time a president of the United States had ever made such a request. This bill was sent back to the Committee on Finance. There it remained until June 8, 1922, when it was reported back to the Senate. Robinson requested that the bill be kept free from politics and from the pressure of the powerful lobby of great financial interests. He believed the bonds could be retired out of current general revenue without setting up a special fund. The measure passed both houses, but President Harding's veto was sustained.⁴⁸

The bonus bill came up again in 1923, complicated this time by the possibility of a tax reduction. Secretary Mellon stated that such a reduction could not be accomplished, but Robinson, on November 26, 1923, took issue with him, saying that Mellon should not stampede Congress into denying just and generous treatment toward the veteran. Further, he believed this bond issue would not seriously or permanently impair any financial obligation of the government.

⁴⁷Ibid., 69 Cong., 1 sess., January 16, 1926, p. 2185.

⁴⁸Ibid., 67 Cong., 2 sess., June 8, 1922, p. 8371.

This theory of reducing taxes and at the same time paying the bonus brought sharp criticism. The New York World cartooned Robinson astride two branching roads, one called "Bonus" and the other "Tax Reduction." The editor commented, "Democracy needs leadership. It will be none the better for leaders who with open eyes head the marching hosts toward the quicksands."⁴⁹ The paper charged the American Legion with undue influence and added that it would be interesting to see if the soldiers received a bonus or the people a tax reduction.⁵⁰ The Kansas City Times compared Mellon and Robinson as the statesman and the politician.⁵¹ Such accusations prompted Robinson to announce that he did not advocate the cash payment of Adjusted Certificates nor any bond issue in excess of two billions.

In Arkansas, there was strong feeling against the bonus, but Robinson felt obligated to vote for it because he thought American soldiers had not been shown proper consideration. Robinson wrote A. D. Whitehead:

. . . a very large class were taken from profitable employment and compelled to perform military duty, while those who took their places were paid large bonuses for labor in civil life. The soldiers received approximately \$1.00 per day while the many who were exempted by law and who superseded them received rich reward. . . . We

⁴⁹New York World, November 28, 1923, Robinson Clippings.

⁵⁰New York Times, November 28, 1923, ibid.

⁵¹Kansas City Times, November 29, 1923, ibid.

who bought Liberty Bonds . . . are still receiving interest on the bonds floated to finance the war, and many of us took tax exempt securities.⁵²

Other allied powers paid their soldiers a bonus, derived in some cases from loans from the United States. Secretary Mellon had stated that there was a surplus of about \$325,000,000 for the year. Robinson felt if this were true taxes could be reduced a quarter of a billion dollars and the bonus still be paid. When the soldiers' bonus measure was revived in 1924 in the Coolidge Administration, Robinson questioned Republican leaders Smoot, Watson, Curtis, and Lodge regarding the attitude of the President, but none would predict his attitude. The bill passed both Congressional houses, but was vetoed by the President.

So eager was Robinson to override Coolidge's veto of the measure that he overstepped his position as minority leader by demanding a vote, for which he was reprimanded by Curtis. Robinson felt the time to settle the bonus issue was while funds were available from reductions in governmental expenditures. The measure providing for adjusted compensation eventually passed over Coolidge's veto.

Paralleling the bonus issue was the controversial Mellon tax reduction plan of 1924. This plan would effect a twenty-five per cent reduction on "earned income" and would

⁵²Robinson to A. D. Whitehead, January 9, 1924, Robinson Papers.

reduce the present normal tax of four per cent to three per cent on the first \$4,000. The application of the surtax on incomes was raised from \$6,000 to \$10,000 and was reduced from 47 to 23.9 per cent on large incomes. At first an advocate of the Mellon plan, he shifted his support to the Simmons amendment which limited the surtax reduction to 37 per cent on large incomes but urged that it rest as lightly as possible on the productive sources of the country and be constant in its revenue yielding power.⁵³

Early in the Coolidge administration Robinson made a speech on the "Security of Private Property and Taxation" in which he expressed his views concerning capitalism. They coincided largely with those of his powerful friend and adviser Bernard Baruch, who objected to publicity concerning personal income as "an invasion of man's privacy."⁵⁴ Baruch felt that the Jones amendment taxing net earnings of corporations prevented corporate saving for an unprofitable year and placed a premium on spending rather than upon saving. The Democratic rates on incomes above \$40,000, he thought a little too strong. The effect of an excessive surtax on business, said Baruch, would be to encourage trade monopoly,

⁵³Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 6, 1924; Cong. Rec., 65 Cong., 1 sess, April 10, 1924, p. 5998.

⁵⁴Baruch believed that more tax money could be secured in the long run by fixing the surtax at twenty per cent which was lower than Mellon's figure. Baruch to Robinson, May 19, 1924, Robinson Papers.

for few would organize a business when they must absorb all the loss and give half the profit to the government.⁵⁵

After the March session of 1925, Robinson discussed tax reduction legislation with Democratic members during the recess, but did not successfully solve the problem in the next session. In February, 1927, Robinson realized that the steering committee was determined to prevent the consideration of any tax reduction bill in 1927 so that they might take political advantage of such an act in the campaign year of 1928.

Robinson's most persistent battle with the Republicans developed over tariff measures. He led the forces seeking to reduce the rates of the Fordney-McCumber Tariff Act, and from April to August, 1922, Simmons, Underwood, and he discussed the bill section by section and introduced amendments on certain items considered essential by the Democrats. Republicans Lenroot and Lodge accused the Democrats of using delaying tactics to keep the measure before the Senate until adjournment. Robinson defended the course taken by the Democrats:

The course which we have pursued here has resulted in great benefit to the country. The debates have informed the public. There is not a great Republican newspaper of which I know in the United States that endorses this measure. . . . By every class of citizens familiar with the provisions of the bill, it is regarded as a legislative monstrosity, justified neither in economic

⁵⁵Baruch to Robinson, May 16, 1924, ibid.

experience nor in political theory. There is no sound basis for it. It discredits every principle of honest protection; it fortifies and entrenches monopoly; it justifies extortion and perpetuates unfair price control over the commodities which are most commonly and generally used.⁵⁶

Robinson characterized the Fordney-McCumber Act as being thrown together to please the selfish interests that dictated it. For example, the duty increase on aluminium was designed to protect a so-called infant industry, which was largely monopolized by the American Aluminum Company.⁵⁷

Strong dissension developed over the proposed reduction of rates on rice. The Payne-Aldrich Act provided higher rates than the Underwood-Simmons Act which lowered them permitting quantities of imported rice to enter the country; this condition was relieved by the Emergency Tariff Act of 1921; now the Fordney-McCumber Bill planned to lower them again. Senators E. B. Broussard of Louisiana, Thaddeus H. Caraway, and Robinson asked for the retention of the rate set by the Emergency Tariff Act of 1921. They charged that the Southern rice growers not be penalized simply because their legislators did not support a general tariff increase.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., June 3, 1922, p. 8111.

⁵⁷Ernest S. Bates, The Story of Congress, 1789-1935 (New York, 1936), 396. This company paid dividends of 1000 per cent on the original capital in 1921, and immediately following passage of the act, declared an additional dividend of 500 per cent.

⁵⁸Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., May 3, 1922, p. 6265. Arkansas rice growers always presented a strong

By July, Robinson felt confident that he had placed the Republicans on the defensive and believed that they would like to abandon the bill if they knew how to do so.⁵⁹

Nevertheless, the Fordney-McCumber Act passed on August 19, 1922; but the assaults of Robinson and the Democrats against the act did not end with its passage. They charged that as a permanent tariff bill it violated every sound economic principle and that it imposed an enormous burden of between three and four billion dollars annually upon the American people.

There was so much protest that President Harding and his administration leaders reconsidered and realized that some of the rates specified in the Fordney-McCumber bill were excessive; consequently they felt justified in adding a flexible tariff provision (known as Section 315) that permitted the President to raise or lower the tariff within fifty per cent of the duty imposed by law. A bi-partisan U. S. Tariff Commission of seven members was established to advise the President. The flexible tariff provision was generally a failure; in most instances tariff rates were substantially increased, and in only one case was a reduction made.

Congress directed the Tariff Commission to investigate

pressure force for tariff protection, but Robinson withstood the demands and took a modest stand.

⁵⁹Robinson to A. D. Whitehead, July 15, 1922, Robinson Papers.

the sugar tariff and make recommendations. After a delay of two years and constant prodding by the Senate, the Commission finally recommended a 25 per cent rate reduction. Even the President was prevailed upon to hold up the report during the state election campaigns. Economically, it appeared to be a battle of the western beet growers and the Louisiana cane growers against the eastern sugar refiners, with the American people paying the difference.⁶⁰ In September, 1924, Coolidge had announced that he needed more time to study the question and in December stated that plans were being made for a thorough reorganization of the Tariff Commission, the Federal Trade Commission, and the United States Shipping Board.⁶¹ On January 2, 1925, Senator Robinson added to the turmoil by introducing a resolution calling for an investigation of pressures placed upon the board by the sugar industry and other interests.⁶² The resolution also censured the President for his delay in handling the sugar report and for his desire to change the board into a high tariff body.⁶³ It was the first political attack on the President since the November election and was considered the most drastic and

⁶⁰Atlanta Constitution, January 5, 1925; New York American, January 3, 1925; Washington Post, January 3, 1925, Robinson Clippings.

⁶¹Washington Times, December 18, 1924, ibid.

⁶²Senate Resolution No. 289, Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 2 sess., January 2, 1925, p. 1063.

⁶³Ibid.

sweeping ever directed at a Chief Executive.⁶⁴ The LaFollette radicals lined up with the Democrats to pass the resolution.

The New York World stated in an editorial that the people had lost confidence in the Tariff Commission, that Congress had delegated a part of its taxing power, and that President Coolidge had completed the commission's disorganization by loading it with "good hard-boiled high protectionists" instead of economists.⁶⁵ Robinson believed the present method of handling the tariff was unscientific and that it had led to "an orgy of chicanery, logrolling, political trading, and coercion," in many cases amounting to actual blackmail, every time Congress worked on the matter.⁶⁶

Undaunted, he introduced a bill that would reduce the personnel of the commission from six to four, by failing to fill the vacancies soon to occur through the expiration of the terms of A. H. Baldwin and Henry G. Glassie.⁶⁷

⁶⁴New York American, January 3, 1925, Robinson Clippings.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Speech on tariff, n.d., Robinson Papers.

⁶⁷Robinson felt that Commissioner H. H. Glassie had committed a questionable act by participating in a review of the sugar tariff rate when his wife and her four brothers and one sister owned a sugar plantation valued at more than \$200,000. Robinson introduced Senate Resolution No. 131 (68th Congress) which requested the tariff commission to adopt a rule forbidding any member to participate in any case in which either he or a member of his family had a financial interest to be affected by the decision.

Glassie had consistently voted with the Republican high protectionists and, Robinson thought, made no pretense of facing the issues.⁶⁸ Senator Robinson's chief purpose was to prevent Coolidge from appointing men who followed his "economic theory [which] was grounded in his New England high tariff policy."⁶⁹

A Senate resolution written by Robinson providing for a broad investigation of the flexible tariff provision of the Fordney-McCumber Act, was amended by Senator King to provide a five-man committee composed of two regular Republicans, one Progressive Republican, and two Democrats.⁷⁰ The appointment of Robinson, William Cabell Bruce of Maryland, and LaFollette by Vice-President Dawes assured an unfavorable report upon the administration's tariff policies. Eight or ten "maverick" Republicans joined the Democrats in demanding the investigation. Robinson was elected chairman of the committee. Public hearings began on March 23, with questions supplied by tariff commissioners Edward P. Costigan and Alfred P. Dennis. Robinson interrogated Chairman Thomas

⁶⁸New York World, December 31, 1925, Robinson Clippings.

⁶⁹William A. White, A Puritan in Babylon (New York, 1938), 385.

⁷⁰Senate Resolution 162, Cong. Rec., 69 Cong., 1 sess., March 13, 1925, p. 207.

O. Marvin of the Tariff Commission.⁷¹ On March 30, Robinson and LaFollette joined in issuing a subpoena demanding the immediate presentation of certain reports made to the President by the Tariff Commission. The statements of Commissioner Dennis before the committee indicated that the board was not functioning properly. The New York Times stated that the Tariff Commission had been discredited and should be abolished.⁷²

Robinson referred in a New York address to the flexible provisions of the 1922 tariff measure as a "disappointing experiment."⁷³ In Virginia, Robinson stated that excessive and prohibitive tariff duties prevented the repayment of debts by foreign countries, that the present tariff law was a glaring instance of unjust and unnecessary taxation, and that it worked "irreparable injury to both foreign commerce and domestic business."⁷⁴

The tariff investigation continued in the next session of Congress, through 1927, and into the spring of 1928. Robinson's personal recommendations for the alteration of

⁷¹Alfred P. Dennis to Robinson, March 27, 1926, Robinson Papers.

⁷²New York Times, April 2, 1926, Robinson Clippings.

⁷³Address, National Council of American Importers and Traders, Hotel Roosevelt, New York, April 7, 1926, Robinson Papers.

⁷⁴Address, before the Democratic Congressional District Convention, Bristol, Virginia, June 15, 1926, ibid.

the Federal Tariff Commission were incorporated in the report of the investigating committee, released in May, 1928. The Committee asked for increased powers for the Tariff Commission and recommended that the Commission and not the President, be granted authority to establish new tariff duties. A change in tariff rate could be reviewed by Congress. The committee further recommended that the Tariff Commission be given equal standing with the Interstate Commerce Commission.⁷⁵ Many members of Congress favored the recommended changes, but with the national election in 1928 approaching, neither party wanted to take action.⁷⁶

At the close of the Sixty-Seventh Congress, March 4, 1923, Robinson reviewed its work, condemning the body for failure to reduce taxes and to relieve the farmer, the working man, the business man, and the ex-service man. In addition to the Fordney-McCumber Act, he said, other partisan measures were the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill, which deprived the states of their police power; the Rivers and Harbors Bill which reduced appropriations in areas of Democratic majorities; the Liberian Loan Bill, designed as a sop to the Negro vote and abandoned after the election; and the lukewarm investigation of scandals in the Republican administration.

⁷⁵Baltimore Sun (Maryland), May 24, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁷⁶Hartford Times (Connecticut), April 11, 1928, ibid.

His closing remarks discredited the Harding administration and painted a dismal picture of the nation's condition:

It is only fair to say that this failure in part is due to the lack of a policy either in the administrative or legislative branches. . . . The Republican leaders have done the best they could. They have applied every quack remedy and nostrum in the Republican pharmacopoeia, but the country is still sick, and especially sick of the reactionary Republican element who dominate both the legislative and executive branches of the government.⁷⁷

During the years 1921 to 1926, Robinson aided in investigation of illegal expenditures in senatorial elections, particularly in the cases of Truman H. Newberry of Michigan and William S. Vare of Pennsylvania. Newberry's campaign admittedly cost \$188,000. After condemning the campaign expenditure as "contrary to sound public policy, harmful to the honor and dignity of the Senate, and dangerous to the perpetuity of a free government,"⁷⁸ the Senate seated Newberry by a vote of 46 to 41. Robinson voted against the seating of Newberry and commented, "You can not make the United States Senate a millionaire's club."⁷⁹ The committee's report exposing Vare's questionable campaign methods eventually brought about his resignation.

A series of scandals threatened to wreck the Harding

⁷⁷Robinson, "Review of the Legislation of the 67th Congress, 1921 - 1923," Robinson Papers.

⁷⁸Pettus, "The Senatorial Career of Joseph Taylor Robinson," 91.

⁷⁹Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., January 10, 1922, p. 1000.

administration. The most sensational of these was the Teapot Dome affair which came to light after Harding's death. The persistent and non-partisan searching of Senator Thomas J. Walsh of Montana revealed that in May, 1921, President Harding transferred the control of the naval oil reserves of the country from Navy Secretary Denby to Secretary of the Interior A. B. Fall, at the latter's request. Secretary Fall had then accepted bribes to lease the reserve at Teapot Dome, Wyoming, to the oil magnate Harry F. Sinclair, and another reserve in the Elk Hills Reservation of California to Edward L. Doheny who had secretly loaned Fall \$100,000. Corruption extended even to Harry M. Daugherty of the Department of Justice who was guilty at least "of the grossest kind of mismanagement and favoritism."⁸⁰

Disturbed by the hesitency of President Coolidge to press this investigation, Herbert Hoover and Charles E. Hughes urged the removal of Daugherty and sought active prosecution.⁸¹ Robinson was vociferous in his denunciation of the administration, stating that neither President Coolidge nor Attorney-General Daugherty had taken steps to investigate the plunder of public oil reserves. He censured the moral stand taken by Edward B. McLean, editor of the *Washington*

⁸⁰Pettus, "The Senatorial Career of Joseph Taylor Robinson," 32.

⁸¹Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933, 54.

Post, in his effort to protect old political friends. By a vote of 89 to 0 the Senate directed the President to institute and prosecute suits to cancel the Teapot Dome leases authorized by Secretary Fall.⁸²

President Coolidge unruffled by the action of the Senate deliberately announced:

If there has been any crime, it must be prosecuted. If there has been any property of the United States illegally transferred or leased, it must be recovered. . . . If there is any guilt, it will be punished; if there is any civil liability, it will be enforced; if there is any fraud, it will be revealed, and if there are any contracts which are illegal, they will be cancelled.⁸³

Robinson sarcastically echoed the President's conditional prosecution of the scandals by saying: "If! If! If!-- the President reached the conclusion that the lease was improvidently or negligently executed, what will he say to Edwin Denby, Secretary of the Navy? Will he say to him, 'Here's your hat; what's your hurry?'"⁸⁴

Determined to force Denby's resignation, Robinson introduced a resolution early in 1924 requesting the President to dismiss Denby.⁸⁵ On the following day, February 12,

⁸²Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., January 31, 1924, p. 1724.

⁸³Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

⁸⁴Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., January 28, 1924, p. 1542.

⁸⁵Southern Magazine (April, 1924), p. 21, Robinson Clippings.

Coolidge released a statement for the Washington Post: "No official recognition can be given to the passage of the Senate resolution relative to their opinion concerning members of the Cabinet or other officers under Executive control." Despite Denby's public statement that he wanted a Senate vote to clear his name of an alleged crime which he had not committed, he could not resist the popular clamor of the Democrats. He submitted his resignation.⁸⁶ Denby's personal honesty, Robinson did not question, but he did feel that Denby had been inefficient, negligent, and indifferent to duty in initiating a transfer of naval oil reserves from his department.⁸⁷

The indifference of Attorney-General Daugherty in bringing the guilty parties to trial stirred up a storm of protest and revealed a bad split in the Republican ranks. Robinson called for a Senatorial investigation on February 23, and Senator Wheeler presented such a resolution. In defense of the Wheeler resolution, he demanded: "Let every rogue in office, whether Democrat or Republican be brought to account. Let the Senate move with majesty and determination, in the face of puny and petulant criticism, to the

⁸⁶Fuess, Calvin Coolidge: The Man from Vermont, 338-39.

⁸⁷Robinson to C. G. Edgar, February 11, 1924, Robinson Papers.

performance of its duties."⁸⁸

As the 1924 campaign drew near, the Democrats did not fail to make the most of the scandals and general corruption of the Harding administration. In April Robinson stated that the Democrats had wished legislation on such measures as tax reduction, adjusted compensation, immigration, a cooperative marketing system, revision of freight rates, and elimination of the Pullman surcharge, about which nothing had as yet been done. He blamed the Republicans for their "almost complete and miserable failure"⁸⁹ to enact any worthwhile legislation.

He continued to reproach the Republicans in an address before the Arkansas State Democratic Convention as he condemned price-fixing for agricultural products and cited the failure of the Fordney-McCumber Act to raise farm prices. He censured President Coolidge's leadership of the World Court issue and further criticized him for his weak stand in exposing corruption in government. The Senator said, "The strong, silent man is a fiction. He does not exist. President Coolidge is honest, but hesitating and weak."⁹⁰ While on the other hand Robinson said the Democratic Senate

⁸⁸Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., March 1, 1924, p. 3401.

⁸⁹Ibid., April 4, 1924, p. 5555.

⁹⁰Address, Arkansas State Democratic Convention, 1924, Robinson Papers.

organization was the most effective fighting force in national politics and placed his party's political standing somewhere between the ultra-conservatism of the Coolidge Republicans and the radicalism of the LaFollette Progressives. (Robinson personally was definitely labeled a progressive leader by the press in 1922 and 1923.)⁹¹

The Democrats did have problems, however. They were divided over the prohibition and Ku Klux Klan issues. Underwood began campaigning in January, visiting Texas, Georgia, Ohio, and other states--speaking on the Klan, the bonus, taxation, tariff reduction, and governmental extravagance. The Smith and McAdoo forces renewed their San Francisco battle. Robinson wrote McAdoo in 1923 that Washington, Montana, Wyoming, and Nebraska showed evidence that Henry Ford's supporters were organizing and campaigning for his nomination, but that the business men of Washington state were supporting McAdoo. He wrote Baruch that he believed Fordism was merely one of the phases "of a deep-seated social and political revolution."⁹² David Lawrence identified Underwood, Carter Glass, and Robinson as three southern "liberal conservatives" but remarked that the spirit of the times called for a progressive radical from the agricultural

⁹¹Washington Herald, December 12, 1922, Robinson Clippings.

⁹²Robinson to Baruch, July 17, 1923, Robinson Papers.

West.⁹³ LaFollette broke away from the Republican party and organized the Progressive Party, drawing many of the Democratic votes from the Midwest.⁹⁴ Robinson sensed this political revolution throughout the United States. It appeared that the old parties were in danger of being superseded by a new organization consisting of an amalgamation of radicals and revolutionaries.

A movement originated in Arkansas to sponsor Robinson's nomination. The Arkansas legislature by concurrent resolution on April 2, 1924, asked the State Democratic Central Committee to pledge the state delegation to Robinson. On April 13, the St. Louis Post Dispatch circulated a lengthy article by Charles G. Ross who reviewed Robinson's life, work, and qualities as a presidential candidate. The Commercial Travelers Association, politically active among 900,000 members, was booming the Robinson movement. Louis Seibold called attention to Robinson's successful alliance between the Democrats and the LaFollette radicals but described him as too emotional and too impulsive.⁹⁵

The Democratic National Convention of 1924 in New York exhausted itself over a bitter struggle between the

⁹³Washington Star, July 13, 1923, Robinson Clippings.

⁹⁴F. L. Owsley, O. P. Chitwood, H. C. Nixon, A Short History of the American People (New York, 1952), II, 563.

⁹⁵New York Sun, April 20, 1924.

forces of McAdoo and Smith. Seventeen Democrats were placed in nomination including Oscar W. Underwood, Carter Glass, James M. Cox, and Thomas J. Walsh. Ex-Governor Charles H. Brough placed Robinson's name before the convention and pointed to his years of public service and his success as a national campaigner whose "proven" leadership could "unite all factions . . . and heal all party wounds."⁹⁶

During the hectic days of balloting Robinson visited the McAdoo and Smith forces. But though the eighteen votes of Arkansas were cast for Robinson throughout the 103 ballots, his total never exceeded forty-six. His selection as a possible compromise candidate seemed imminent when he left the conference at 4:00 A.M., but George E. Brennan of Chicago intervened, and John W. Davis was selected by the convention. The story is ably told by Grady Miller who attended the convention:

Unless one was actually on the ground, it is difficult to realize how seriously Senator Robinson was considered for the nomination. Two days before the nomination of Mr. Davis it was generally agreed that Senator Robinson was the most available compromise candidate and had the break come a day earlier I am confident that the convention would have swung to him. The delegates were weary and worn out at the time of the nomination and when they discovered that Mr. Davis could be nominated they were glad to vote for him and thus get away from the scene. I consider that the Democrats made a very distinguished nomination, for everyone concedes

⁹⁶Charles A. Greathouse (compl.), Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, New York, 1924 (Indianapolis, 1924), 105.

that Mr. Davis is a man of high character and possesses great ability.⁹⁷

In September, Robinson began to worry about the outcome of the campaign. He wrote that Davis was making a magnificent campaign, but his utterances drew responses which reflected "general apathy and listlessness."⁹⁸ The Republican party pulled funds from the great industrial enterprises and controlled most of the great metropolitan newspapers.

Ten days of balloting split the Democratic party so wide and deep that eight years were required to heal the breach. And no matter how logically the Democratic candidate talked, no matter with what justice he assailed the Republican position, no matter how hard he tried to make the corruption of Republican leaders in the oil scandals a vital issue, his cause was foredoomed.⁹⁹ Calvin Coolidge won an easy victory over John W. Davis.

Though two years intervened between the national campaign of 1924 and the Congressional elections of 1926 the Democrats worked diligently to regain the seats they lost in 1924. Since Robinson's Senate colleague Thaddeus Caraway had little opposition, he was therefore glad to be available when the committee asked him to speak in Virginia, Kentucky,

⁹⁷Grady Miller to Bush Binley, July 28, 1924, Robinson Papers.

⁹⁸Robinson to Baruch, September 26, 1924, ibid.

⁹⁹White, A Puritan in Babylon, 307.

Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and Oklahoma in behalf of the candidates for the Senate. They felt it necessary to draft new strategy. This strategy as voiced by Robinson called for a bi-partisan farm block and a revision of the tariff (under consideration so long) in the coming session of Congress.

Republican Senator William M. Butler of Massachusetts, welcomed the tailor-made issue of the tariff and declared that the Democrats sought to curtail New England industry; he singled out Robinson as the instigator. He said:

The National leaders of the Democratic party decided during the closing weeks of the last Congress that they needed an issue. They could not make much progress attacking the administration in power, because too many of them had found it politically expedient to support the administration on practically every major issue. And so Senator Robinson of Arkansas . . . rose in his place and declared that the tariff must be the issue, and he called for a coalition between the Democrats of the South and the Republicans from the agricultural West.¹⁰⁰

Robinson counterattacked by saying that the Republicans could not dodge the responsibility for the failure of farm legislation or for the lack of prosperity among the lower income groups. He declared:

The country needs and must have a moral awakening. Honesty in the administration of public affairs should always be the first test of a party's fitness for power, and efficiency should be the next. This campaign is being conducted by the Republicans behind the smoke screen of alleged or fictitious prosperity.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰Boston Globe, August 19, 1926, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰¹Statement, n.d., Robinson Papers.

The extensive campaigning waged by Robinson and the other speakers of the Democratic party brought results. The Democrats had 47 senators in January, 1927, as compared to 27 in January, 1923.

Senator Alben W. Barkley expressed his gratitude for Robinson's splendid assistance in bringing the Democratic message to Kentucky, and Elmer Thomas made a similar statement: "I heard many comments on your Oklahoma City speech, and have no hesitancy in saying that it was responsible in a very large degree for the favorable vote received in Oklahoma City and County."¹⁰²

After this brief interlude of Senatorial campaigning Robinson returned to Washington to take up his legislative duties. The Democratic platform of 1924 had urged federal operation of the Muscle Shoals plant only for the manufacture of commercial fertilizers. The Underwood bill had sought a limited development of the area, but the Norris bill advocated a vast project that was later incorporated under the Tennessee Valley Authority during Roosevelt's administration. Robinson had a laissez-faire attitude, typical of many southern senators, toward Federal power development. He personally favored private rather than Federal power development and joined other Southern Democrats and President

¹⁰²Barkley to Robinson, December 2, 1926; Thomas to Robinson, November 17, 1926, ibid.

Coolidge in opposing Senator Norris.

Norris did not pass up the chance to satirize the close relationship which he assumed existed among Coolidge, Robinson, Harrison, Underwood, and Heflin:

This has been really a wonderful combination of the two great political machines. There are Silent Cal at the head, Smiling Oscar, Happy Pat, Jovial Joe, and "Me Too" Tom, all bound up together by the sacred ties of fertilizer, five souls with but a single thought, five hearts that beat as one. Going to the banquet hall, the dinner would be furnished by the Electric Trust, the General Electric Company, the seasoning for meats and soups supplied in the shape of fertilizer by the Alabama Power Co., the liquid refreshments given to them by the Republican National Committee. What a glorious jubilee they could have!¹⁰³

In search for a response Robinson answered that Senator Norris lacked evidence to prove his contention that the power trust opposed the Norris Bill and supported the Underwood measure. The press gave a vivid word picture of Robinson at the time to the effect that Robinson said one must be governed by his convictions and that so-called poisoned darts of insinuation would not make him succumb to power interests.¹⁰⁴

The St. Louis Globe-Democrat reported:

Senator Robinson of Arkansas may or may not be a great statesman, but he gave a great show. This afternoon he unlimbered against Senator Norris of Nebraska and thereby restored the ruddy glow of health to the Senate's Muscle Shoals debate. You could hear him as

¹⁰³Cong. Rec., 68 Cong., 1 sess., January 9, 1925, p. 1507.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 1508.

far away as the Supreme Court Chambers.

In the course of his bombardment of Norris and his defense of Coolidge he simultaneously perspired and grew pale--no mean feat in forensics, surely. He hammered his doubled-up right hand into his open left--his favorite gesture--and thus produced a sound usually attained by only a carpenter driving nails into a 2x4. He has a voice like a hammer, too, and when you are at a distance . . . the prodigious dramatic effects which the Senator creates with his words, you must back up the words with the picture of a pale, vehement, stocky, resonant man, with blazing eyes, hammering these sentences into George W. Norris, who at the moment is sitting extremely low in his senatorial seat across the aisle.¹⁰⁵

Senator Norris introduced resolutions concerning the operation of Muscle Shoals five times between 1926 and 1933. Each time he suffered defeat either by a presidential veto or by lack of action in committee.¹⁰⁶ Robinson traditionally opposed these resolutions until 1933 when Norris succeeded in getting Democratic approval of TVA.

One of the most controversial issues in recent American history has been that of the United States membership in the Permanent Court of International Justice. Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson wanted to create such a court; Presidents Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, and Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to join it. United States membership in the World Court received the unanimous endorsement of the American Bar Association, the support of every outstanding authority on international law, and the approval on March 3,

¹⁰⁵St. Louis Globe-Democrat, January 10, 1925, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰⁶Norris, Fighting Liberal, 250.

1925, by a vote of 301 to 28.

On February 24, 1923, President Harding sent a message to the Senate urging its approval of World Court membership. The next day Robinson released a statement supporting Harding. Before the annual convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution at Washington, April 22, 1924, Robinson urged entrance into the court. He accused Senator Lodge of having effectively and probably permanently pigeonholed the proposal.¹⁰⁷ The Democratic Senate Conference, at Robinson's request, resolved to demand consideration of World Court membership, and Robinson moved on March 13, 1925, that the Senate consider this measure on December 17, 1925.¹⁰⁸ In the meantime, the following plea was made for public support of membership before a meeting of the Mississippi Bar Association at Laurel, on April 29, 1925:

The Court has rendered many important decisions and every one of them has been accepted by the disputants as just and binding. It is this and not the authority of force that will make the Court a powerful factor for world peace. . . . Treaties are powerless to prevent wars when fear and animosity . . . become the controlling factors in the conduct of the affairs between two nations. . . . As we honor our own courts and uphold them in their efforts to suppress violence and to administer justice, let us seek to expand the influence of the principles upon which they rest to a broader sphere than is comprehended by the sovereignty of the United States.

¹⁰⁷Washington Star, April 4, 1924, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰⁸Cong. Rec., 69 Cong., 1 sess., March 13, 1925, p. 207.

Let us encourage their extension to international controversies in the hope that in time to come law will become . . . [a potent factor] for the prevention of violence [among nations].¹⁰⁹

Senator James Reed, Hiram Johnson, and Cole Blaise prevented a vote on the World Court Resolution, and thus blocked important legislation. John Henry Wigmore, dean of Northwestern University Law School, made this statement before the St. Louis Bar Association: "The most terrible mistake Missouri ever made was to allow Jim Reed to go back to the United States Senate. . . . Reed is a useless member of society. It is not only his stand against the World Court that makes me particularly bitter against him. His make-up is of a destructive character."¹¹⁰ Robinson charged Reed with seeking to pull the Democratic temple down upon himself. Reed and Borah considered the organization of another "Battalion of Death" throughout the country to fight passage of the World Court Resolution and campaigned openly against the re-election of Lenroot of Wisconsin and McKinley of Illinois, who were supporting the resolution.

Reed and Borah spoke in Chicago on the same date, February 21, 1926, with Reed addressing the Knights of Columbus at the Palmer House, and Borah speaking to throngs at

¹⁰⁹ Speech on World Court, Laurel, Mississippi, April 29, 1925, Robinson Papers.

¹¹⁰ Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

the Coliseum. Their arrival marked the beginning of a parade thirty-five miles long, with from 2500 to 3000 cars displaying bunting and anti-World Court signs. Reed referred to the nine judges of the World Court as "nine judicial ciphers sitting in a vacuum."¹¹¹

To counteract the Borah-Reed influence, Robinson made addresses before the Chamber of Commerce of East St. Louis on March 16, and before the Iroquois Club at Chicago on March 17. He emphasized the duty of the United States to promote peaceful adjustments of international controversies:

. . . In no other way than by substituting law for force can the United States contribute its share to the progress of mankind. . . . Those who ridicule the World Court assume a tremendous responsibility without discharging it. They lift no torch to light the pathway whereby mankind may hope to ascend from the abyss of fear and danger to the level ground of safety under law. . . . The tribunal has justified itself to the world.¹¹²

President Coolidge appreciated Robinson's staunch support of the World Court resolution and wrote him a personal note:

Last Saturday I tried to get you and Mrs. Robinson to go on the Mayflower with us, but found you were out of town. I am therefore taking this formal way of expressing my gratitude to you for your support of the World Court. Our foreign relations ought to be all conducted on a purely nonpartisan basis with the responsible elements in both parties making every possible effort to agree on a policy. Otherwise the foreign press quotes those who are opposed and gets the impression that the

¹¹¹Chicago Tribune, February 22, 1926, ibid.

¹¹²Speech on World Court, East St. Louis, Illinois, March 16, 1926, Robinson Papers.

country is not united, which is very harmful to our foreign interests. No doubt you realize that I am constantly working to have the responsible elements of both parties in harmony on the foreign policy of our country. Your loyal support was a great satisfaction to me, not only because of its effectiveness but because of the high estimation I place in your judgment. I should be pleased if you would quietly express to your colleagues on the Democratic side my great appreciation of their support.
 . . .¹¹³

Before the Senate would agree for the United States to become a member of the World Court, it insisted upon five resolutions placing certain limitations upon membership. These were supported by Robinson as well as by almost all of the Senate membership.¹¹⁴ At the Geneva Conference in September, 1926, the World Court members agreed to all resolutions except parts of two, but the United States Senate refused to concede to these reservations. The point of contention was the fifth reservation which would deny a request by the council or assembly of the League for an advisory opinion upon a question which the United States had declined to submit for judgment.

A later attempt to introduce the World Court issue was blocked by Robinson on the ground that it would serve no useful purpose, and the motion was laid upon the table February 9, 1927. Later, in 1929, Robinson reiterated the advantages this nation had lost by refusing to enter the World Court:

¹¹³Coolidge to Robinson, February 17, 1926, ibid.

¹¹⁴Vote taken on January 26, 1926.

. . . The failure of this government to lend encouragement to any enterprise designed to promote the harmonious settlement of questions out of which war may come has disappointed mankind and subjected the United States to criticism and suspicion. What wholesome end will be accomplished by entering the Court in such a manner as to indicate that the people of the United States have little confidence in international judicial tribunals? Why resume the issue unless it is to be met in a spirit which will offset the harm that has already come from delay and indecision.¹¹⁵

The agricultural problem during the Harding-Coolidge administration was acute because of overproduction and falling prices; the farmer sold in an international market and purchased in a national market, limited by a manufacturers' tariff on many items. Coming from an agricultural state, Robinson dealt with the problem at first hand; and as Democratic Senate leader, he saw its national aspects.

In 1922 he criticized the Federal Farm Loan Board, urging that its restrictive credit policy be replaced immediately by a more lenient policy in granting farm loans. He called attention to the fact that no loans had been made on Arkansas applications in several months, and that the sale of additional Federal Land Bank bonds for the purpose of making loans would not provide sufficient funds for Arkansas loan requirements.¹¹⁶

Robinson supported the move to bring the Norris bill

¹¹⁵Address, "The Apple of Discord," Central College, Conway, Arkansas, May 29, 1929, Robinson Papers.

¹¹⁶Cong. Rec., 67 Cong., 2 sess., February 3, 1922, p. 2110.

before the Senate but opposed placing the Federal government permanently in the business of buying and selling agricultural products. Robinson believed that price-fixing by federal authority would eventually hurt the farmers whom the legislation was designed to benefit.¹¹⁷

In June, 1926, the Senate was considering the Haugen Bill which Robinson believed Coolidge would veto should it pass Congress. When Secretary Mellon released a letter expressing his opposition, the measure was defeated. At this point Robinson offered an open coalition to the midwest farm block with a promise that the Senate would stay in session until the farmers secured a relief measure.¹¹⁸ His own opposition to the Haugen Bill was based on a doubt of the constitutionality of levying the equalization fee, which amounted in substance to a tax on the producers of agricultural products. Therefore, on June 24, 1926, he offered an amendment authorizing the creation of a farmers' export corporation with five directors appointed by the President; the capital stock of \$200,000,000 was to be subscribed by the Federal government. On this basis the corporation could issue bonds up to \$800,000,000 and make loans for handling surplus farm commodities up to \$1,000,000,000. This proposal did not include the levying of an equalization fee or any

¹¹⁷Ibid., 67 Cong., 3 sess., December 19, 1922, p. 672.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 69 Cong., 1 sess., June 16, 1926, p. 11360.

other charge or tax on sales. Robinson's amendment was rejected 39 to 45.

Large cotton surpluses in the fall of 1926 brought greatly depressed prices. Robinson wired Baruch for suggestions for a practical remedy for the cotton market situation. The financier suggested immediate action before the cotton passed out of the hands of the producer, and urged that the Intermediate Credits Act could be used, with the farmer borrowing on cotton placed in warehouses. Robinson supported Baruch's suggestion but it was not implemented.

In November, 1926, Robinson was still attempting to find some way of eliminating the equalization fee plan. He stated: "I would be willing to close my public career if I could be instrumental in forming and enacting a sound, practical plan for farm principles."¹¹⁹ In February, 1927, Robinson wrote Baruch that he believed the 1927 version of the McNary-Haugen bill was better than the earlier version, yet he saw the danger of encouraging overproduction. He voted for the 1927 version of the bill with 22 other Democrats, supported the Senate in opposing President Coolidge, and in the spring of 1928 urged the Senate to override the veto of President Coolidge.¹²⁰

¹¹⁹Robinson to Baruch, November 8, 1926, Robinson Papers.

¹²⁰For further discussion of Coolidge's basic philosophy of and veto of the McNary-Haugen bill, see Fuess, Calvin Coolidge: The Man from Vermont, 382; Cong. Rec., 69 Cong., 2 sess., February 11, 1927, p. 3518.

Perhaps Robinson's greatest contribution to constructive legislation during his entire career lay in his consistent efforts for flood control legislation which gained recognition in the Coolidge administration and bears fruit today in the improved conditions of the former flood areas. Robinson knew of flood conditions at first hand, having experienced the periodic overflows in his own state during his lifetime. The state of Arkansas is drained by the Arkansas, White, St. Francis, and Ouachita Rivers; and the Mississippi forms the eastern boundary of the state. From Cape Girardeau, Missouri, south to the Gulf, the Mississippi flows through a rich, level flood plain broadening out in the state of Arkansas to a distance of 30 to 40 miles. All the major portion of seventeen states poured their flood waters into the lower Mississippi through its larger tributaries. The levee system along the banks of the Mississippi were inadequate, and it was apparent that the flood waters could not be controlled by continually raising the levees.

Robinson became the leader and recognized authority of the flood control group in Congress after the retirement of Senator Ransdell of Louisiana. He began a drive to extend the jurisdiction of the Mississippi River Commission to include the lower Arkansas flood basin. In 1923 his amendment accomplished the extension of jurisdiction of the Commission to include all tributaries and outlets of the

Mississippi affected by its flood waters. This included the major tributaries, i.e., the Arkansas, the Red, the Missouri, the Ohio, the Tennessee, the Cumberland, and the White rivers.

When repeated storms in the Arkansas, Mississippi, and Ohio river basins in the early part of April, 1927, brought predictions of the worst floods in 96 years, Robinson hastened to Arkansas to assist in flood relief. On April 19 he wired the United States Army Engineers at Memphis to dispatch tug and steel barges to rescue marooned people. He also wired the Secretary of War for assistance and in response the Seventh Corps Area Commander sent a staff officer to Little Rock with authority to cooperate with Governor Martineau. He wrote that the newspapers had not exaggerated the appalling conditions:

Numerous towns in Arkansas are completely submerged, millions of acres of cultivated lands are covered by many feet of water, many lives have been lost and the property damage cannot be approximated. The levees everywhere are giving away and it is feared that the worst is yet to come. Two days ago ten inches of rain fell in Little Rock in less than twenty-four hours. . . . Numerous bridges on railways and highways have gone out. Thousands of flood refugees are pouring into the cities. All our fraternal and social organizations are giving and working in a spirit of self-sacrifice.¹²¹

When repeated efforts to secure aid from the President and Secretary of Agriculture were rejected, Robinson appealed over radio station WMC of Memphis, on April 28, for

¹²¹Robinson to Baruch, April 23, 1927, Robinson Papers.

the country to care for the refugees and to suggest legislation that would prevent recurrence of the flood.

Robinson, accompanied by an Arkansas committee composed of prominent business men and financiers, went to Washington on May 6 and conferred with Secretary Mellon, Undersecretary of Treasury Ogden Mills, Eugene Meyer of the Federal Farm Board, and Paul Bestor of the Intermediate Credit Bank of St. Louis, on the extension of financial assistance for the rehabilitation of the farmers in the flooded areas. The committee presented a well-developed plan for the creation of an Agricultural Credit Corporation with a capital stock of \$500,000 which had already been assured by the leading banks, business firms, and the people of Arkansas. This corporation would make loans directly to needy farmers in the flooded areas. On May 9, Harvey Couch of Arkansas Power and Light Company wired Robinson that splendid progress was being made in securing subscriptions. Robinson contributed \$500.00 to the fund. This plan had the complete support of Secretary Mellon.¹²²

Public sentiment was expressed by Hamp Williams, a banker in Hot Springs:

More than six million acres or ten thousand square miles of the richest farming land in the world is under water and five hundred thousand southerners--not foreigners, are being made paupers against their will and

¹²²Robinson to H. G. Couch, May 8, 1927, ibid.

and the balance of us are made beggars, pleading with the outside world to help us feed and clothe our paupers, made so by the overflow of a great river which belongs to the United States Government which has been warned many times of its dangers.

This flood-water has come to us from thirty-two states and has almost bankrupted the South. We are wondering what the richest Government in the world is going to do for us in this national calamity? . . . Our Government gave European sufferers one-hundred million dollars. Why not do as much for our own? If Congress was called together and would appropriate a hundred million dollars or more and these poor people are reimbursed for their losses as near as possible, a shout would go up to heaven from a solid South, thanking God for such a country as this.¹²³

The levees in Arkansas were so broken and weakened that nearly a billion dollars was needed for repair and restoration. These funds were not in sight; meanwhile, the lands lay unprotected from the slightest flooding of the river system. On May 31, Robinson proclaimed the Mississippi Valley the "most vital and pressing domestic issue" that had arisen during the past 25 years.¹²⁴ In preparing for the December session of Congress, he drafted a bill which would extend the jurisdiction of the Mississippi River Commission and provide for the construction of levees throughout the valley of the Mississippi river and its tributaries,¹²⁵ under the direction of the Federal government. It provided for

¹²³Hamp Williams to Robinson, May 14, 1927, ibid.

¹²⁴Press release, May 31, 1927, ibid.

¹²⁵Robinson assisted in preparation of the original Flood Control Act of 1917. An amendment by him in 1923 extended its jurisdiction to include the areas affected by back water from the Mississippi River.

surveys to determine the practicability of reservoirs, the straightening of the Mississippi channel, and the creation and use of spillways, and for the necessary increase of engineer personnel to make the survey. In addition it allocated liberal federal appropriation of \$100,000,000 annually for the construction and repair of levees.

This measure recognized also the necessity for immediate repair.¹²⁶ Robinson showed that he favored dams not only for flood control but also for generation and distribution of power in an article in the Dixie Magazine.¹²⁷

After Secretary Hoover visited the flood area, he said he felt that the construction of levees and spillways was more desirable than reforestation, contour plowing, and building reservoirs. He believed that the extent of the control made it a Federal problem.¹²⁸ He saw that the initial appropriation of \$100,000,000 was too small. Arkansas honored Hoover with a testimonial dinner before his departure to Washington, and Robinson praised him and in doing so, drove home his major objectives for Federal legislation:

Mr. Hoover's heart has not only shared the sorrows and burdens of the passing flood disaster . . . legislation for comprehensive and permanent protection against flood will find . . . him a courageous advocate. . . .
The burden of flood control must be assumed by the

¹²⁶Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), June 6, 1927.

¹²⁷Dixie Magazine, Vol. III (June, 1927), 10.

¹²⁸Herbert Hoover, "Hoover Outlines Flood Problems," Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), June 12, 1927.

national government; the jurisdiction of the Mississippi River Commission extended to embrace the tributaries and outlets of the parent stream; and the levees on the Mississippi and its tributaries rebuilt where destroyed, repaired where damaged and strengthened so as to give the best protection possible. . . .¹²⁹

Once Hoover was back under the influence of Coolidge, his ardor cooled on the subject of increased Federal contribution to the Mississippi River flood control; and he wrote that the Senator and the people of Arkansas overestimated his service during the time of the flood.¹³⁰

By July 1, some 163,000 people were still living in refugee camps, in tents on levees or high ground. Many, ill-clad, poorly-fed, and suffering from pellagra, attempted to start the planting cycle over again behind the receding waters. The allotment of \$16,000,000 was totally inadequate to provide for the needs of the destitute. In some instances Red Cross funds were poorly supervised and many felt shocked that a complacent national government with \$600,000,000 surplus would ignore the desperate needs of 300,000 suffering flood refugees.¹³¹

For the sake of harmony the advocates of flood legislation at the 1927 December session of Congress included only the construction of adequate levees with possible spill-

¹²⁹Address at dinner honoring Herbert Hoover, Little Rock, Arkansas, June 11, 1927, Robinson Papers.

¹³⁰Hoover to Robinson, July 5, 1927, ibid.

¹³¹Newsclipping, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

ways.¹³² Coolidge released a statement that he desired to deal adequately with the flood problem and also to advance the system of inland waterways.

Robinson opposed the Jones Flood Control Bill because it assessed the local areas for part of the construction and maintenance expense. After several conferences he proposed an amendment extending Federal control to the tributaries by the construction of necessary dams, which, with the amendment eliminating local contribution, he felt increased the acceptability of the bill. When it appeared that passage of the flood bill would be blocked by the introduction of the migratory bird bill, Robinson took the floor and in a voice charged with emotion, proclaimed flood control the most important question before Congress. On the 28th of March he secured passage of the Jones Flood Control Bill through the Senate after only two hours' debate. Then the House held up the bill because of the opposition of President Coolidge. After several personal visits with the President, Robinson worked out a compromise measure that was acceptable to Congress and to the President. It was signed May 15, 1928. This act authorized the Corps of Engineers to survey and study the drainage basins of major tributaries and the selection of sites for a reservoir system that would control

¹³² Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), July 25, 1927.

the flood waters of the Mississippi river system.¹³³ This study covered a period of seven years and was submitted as House Document No. 259, Seventy-fourth Congress, first session.

The problems of flood control continued to necessitate legislation as they arose through the years and Robinson continued to be the acknowledged champion of such measures as long as he lived. Drainage and irrigation bills; measures dealing with the setback of levees, the construction of spillways and reservoirs; provision for a national flood control policy; emergency legislation for the care of flood victims in later disasters; all these brought forth Robinson's most vigorous efforts extending into the second Roosevelt administration. The marked progress evident today in Robinson's own state of Arkansas and in all the Southern states formerly devastated by seasonal floods, stands as a tribute to what is probably the greatest accomplishment in his entire career.

¹³³Studies were made by the Army Engineers on the basins of such rivers as the Red, the Arkansas, the White, the Missouri, the Ohio, the Cumberland, and the Tennessee, and their major tributaries.

CHAPTER VII

NOMINATION FOR VICE PRESIDENT IN 1928

Soon after the defeat of 1924, national Democratic leaders turned to the consideration of a ticket for 1928. They hoped not only to avoid deadlocks such as occurred at San Francisco and New York, but also to reconcile the differences expressed at these conventions. Therefore, Senator Robinson sought to harmonize Catholics with Protestants, "wets" with "drys," and industrial East with agricultural South and Mid-west. Later, at the Houston convention he helped to prevent expressions of discord from reaching the floor.¹

In preparation for the 1928 convention, Robinson held a party caucus, March 5, 1927, to smooth out differences among the Democratic senators. He believed that unless they could eliminate the controversial subjects of prohibition and religion, they could not hope "to present a united front." A "wet" plank in the platform, he claimed, would aid in carrying only five or six states and would cause the

¹Robinson to James Madden, February 7, 1927, Robinson Papers.

loss of the remaining states.²

In the spring of 1927, Robinson was troubled over the lack of presidential caliber in the party. He discussed the subject with Bernard M. Baruch. He felt that Governor Alfred E. Smith of New York, William G. McAdoo, former Secretary of Treasury, or Senator James A. Reed of Missouri, "would alienate certain groups of voters." His own choice was Owen D. Young. Robinson doubted "whether any Democrat could carry the East over President Coolidge, should he be renominated, and for this reason the party might find it prudent to look to the West or Middle West." He explained that McAdoo was "strong" in that section of the country, but felt that his name on the ticket would be like "a red flag" to Smith's supporters. He described Senator Reed as "brilliant and forceful" but lacking in "balance and judgment."³ No Democrat seemed to possess a personality sufficient to oppose Frank O. Lowden, who appeared to be a strong contender for the Republican nomination in the Midwest.

Robinson feared that Senators Reed of Missouri, Cavanaugh of Arkansas, and William Cabell Bruce of Maryland, were "determined" to alienate all sympathy for the Democratic party. Bruce sought to establish prohibition and religion

²Robinson to Bernard M. Baruch, March 24, 1927, ibid.

³Robinson to Baruch, April 15, 1927, ibid.

as the issues for the next campaign; Caraway openly attacked Smith; and Reed, according to Robinson, blindly denounced "everything and everybody" who came within his reach or vision. In addition, Robinson stated that Bruce had "recklessly and foolishly offended" Senators Walsh of Massachusetts, Hawes of Missouri, and Pittman of Nevada by his unwarranted attacks upon them in the Senate just prior to its adjournment and committed "incalculable harm" to the candidacy of Maryland's governor Albert C. Ritchie; he felt the Democrats should submerge the issues upon which they were divided and unite upon some fundamental principles to which they could all subscribe.⁴

While Senator Robinson remained "quiet" and refused to advocate openly any candidate in this pre-convention period, Governor Smith was receiving an increasing number of pledged delegates through the able campaign management of Franklin D. Roosevelt and George R. Van Namee of New York. Smith's rise from the east side of New York City had given him a keen insight into the problems of the city and the poor, and his understanding of their problems had created a large and loyal following. His election to a fourth term as governor of New York in 1926 was without precedent, and his administrations had been noted for the enactment of progressive legislation and for the efficient management of the

⁴Robinson to Baruch, April 15, 1927, ibid.

state departments and bureaus. But his appeal in the solid South, the Southwest, and the Pacific Coast area was limited because of his close association with Tammany Hall, his Roman Catholic faith, and his open approval of a revision of the Volstead Act and the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment.

As Smith's delegation strength increased, Southern Protestant leaders sought Robinson's support in blocking the Governor's nomination. Reverend Selsus E. Tull, First Baptist Church of Pine Bluff, Arkansas, warned Robinson that Smith's nomination would cause great "political confusion" in the South:

You have a great and respected influence in Arkansas, but don't you fool yourself with the idea that you can hold things together down here if Al Smith is foisted upon the Party. I know scores of Baptist and Methodist Preachers who will take the stump against you or any other political speaker who would advocate Smith's election.⁵

The Baptist and Reflector, the Arkansas Methodist, and twenty-five other religious papers in the South opposed Smith's nomination.⁶ Methodist bishops also asked Robinson to prevent the nomination of Smith⁷ and to hold fast to his denominational principles.⁸

⁵Selsus E. Tull to Robinson, January 16, 1928, ibid.

⁶A. C. Miller to Robinson, June 12, 1928, ibid.

⁷Bishop H. A. Boaz to Robinson, June 21, 1928, ibid.

⁸Candler to Robinson, July 20, 1928, ibid.

These attacks on Governor Smith's religion were repugnant to Robinson. He often stated that if ministers preached politics from the pulpit, their congregations would split, their influence would decline among the members, and the Democratic party would be disrupted in the South. A man's religion, he felt, should not prevent him from seeking office in any party. To oppose Governor Smith on the ground of his religion seemed to him "unjust and un-American."⁹

Although he disapproved the attacks upon Smith because of his religion, still as late as April, Robinson was not an avowed supporter of Smith.¹⁰ Yet the action of an uninstructed Arkansas delegation in supporting Smith curbed the choice of anti-Smith delegations in other Southern states, which followed a wait-and-see policy until late in June.¹¹ Robinson watched the Southern politicians and senators turn to Smith as a possible "saviour" whose leadership would re-establish the national popularity of the Party.¹² He did not believe that they reflected the majority opinion of the voters¹³ but that they supported Smith as the only possible

⁹Robinson to Selsus E. Tull, January 20, 1928, ibid.

¹⁰Robinson to Elmer E. Clarke, April 5, 1928, ibid.

¹¹Clinton W. Gilbert, "The Daily Mirror of Washington," Evening Post, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

¹²Richard V. Oulahan, "Observation from Times Watch-Towers," New York Times, April 1, 1928, ibid.

¹³Robinson to Elmer E. Clarke, April 5, 1928, Robinson Papers.

candidate who could win.¹⁴ By June, he realized Smith's nomination was inevitable and agreed to support him "in good faith."¹⁵

Other Democrats were mentioned as presidential nominees. Senator Walter F. George of Georgia was endorsed by his state executive committee.¹⁶ Senator Reed of Missouri received the support of Senator Caraway, who identified him as a "second Andrew Jackson."¹⁷ The Houston Chronicle editorially mentioned Cordell Hull of Tennessee; Governor Ritchie of Maryland, a "wet," Governor Donahey of Ohio, a "dry," Senator Carter Glass of Virginia, and Robinson as men of ability.¹⁸ Senator Pat Harrison of Mississippi was mentioned as a favorite son.¹⁹

Democratic candidates for the vice presidency included Colonel Hollins N. Randolph of Atlanta, the great-grandson of Thomas Jefferson;²⁰ Senator Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky;

¹⁴Allen H. Hamiter, Speaker of Arkansas House of Representatives, to Robinson, May 11, 1928, ibid.

¹⁵Robinson to W. G. Craine, June 15, 1928, ibid.

¹⁶Macon News (Georgia), January 22, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁷Associated Press newsclipping, Nashville, Tennessee, April 13, 1927, Robinson Papers.

¹⁸Houston Chronicle, editorial, April 14, 1927, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁹Washington Star, February 26, 1928, ibid.

²⁰Macon News, January 22, 1928, ibid.

Senator Harrison of Mississippi; Governor William J. Bulow of South Dakota; Major George L. Berry of Tennessee, president of the International Printing Pressman's Union; and Robinson.

Meanwhile Robinson did not lose sight of the Republican maneuverings. When President Coolidge said in a terse news release on August 2, 1927: "I do not choose to run in Nineteen Twenty-eight," Robinson countered: "The declaration by the President . . . is a case of Caesar refusing the crown with such hesitation that it suggests that the crown will be accepted if actually tendered."²¹

There was no lack of candidates in the Republican field. Prominent on the list of names available were those of Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover, Vice-President Dawes, Governor Lowden of Illinois, and Majority Leader Charles C. Curtis of the Senate. Hoover had the active support of the Secretary of the Interior, Dr. Hubert Work, who had developed a strong following among the state and local Republican leaders.²² Robinson felt that Hoover was far in the lead but was drawing the fire of his opponents.²³ Lowden's position, Robinson thought, was weakened because the

²¹Typed statement, n.d., Robinson Papers.

²²Mark Sullivan, newsclipping, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1927, Robinson Clippings.

²³Robinson to Elmer E. Clarke, April 5, 1928, Robinson Papers.

aggressive elements looked to the leadership of Borah and Norris.²⁴ Vice-President Dawes appeared to him to be "a stronger candidate than Hoover"²⁵ and might be "the prospective dark horse."²⁶ Senator Curtis, a friend of Robinson for many years, refused to be a "stalking horse" for some other candidate but would accept the nomination himself.

Few campaigns in their pre-convention stage have aroused as much interest as did this one. During 1927, The Pathfinder polled 130,000 people on their choice for president and on their opinion concerning current political questions. The returns favored the Republicans two to one. Coolidge and Smith were the people's choice for the Republican and Democratic parties. Robinson's support was insignificant. He ranked twelfth, receiving 110 votes for president and 267 for vice-president out of approximately 45,000 votes polled. On the question of farm relief the poll showed the people evenly divided for the Coolidge plan, the McNary-Haugen bill, and a compromise scheme. Further, they believed that prohibition was a success; they supported an increase in the national defense; and they approved restricted immigration overwhelmingly. They were divided on approving the

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Sullivan, newsclipping, Washington, D. C., October 26, 1927, Robinson Clippings.

foreign policy of Coolidge but considered the country prosperous.²⁷

Robinson eliminated himself as a presidential candidate as early as August, 1927. He told C. Hamilton Moses, a law partner and later president of the Arkansas Power and Light Company, that the Arkansas delegation would be chosen for its ability and loyalty. He desired an indorsement of his own record in the Senate, but was not seeking the nomination.²⁸ He asked that the Arkansas delegation to the Houston convention remain uninstructed.²⁹ Oklahoma leaders³⁰ wished to organize their delegation for him, but he asked them not to pledge their delegation in his behalf.³¹ Such actions increased Robinson's popularity among the Smith supporters.

Robinson gained national publicity and recognition by his immediate response in the Senate to an anti-Catholic tirade of Senator Tom Heflin. Those who heard him that memorable afternoon of January 18, 1928, did not forget the

²⁷The Pathfinder (Washington, D. C.), January 7, 1928, ibid.

²⁸Robinson to C. H. Moses, August 12, 1927, Robinson Papers.

²⁹New York Times, March 24, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

³⁰Ex-Governor C. N. Haskell, Governor Henry Johnston, and Judge James Armstrong, chairman of Oklahoma Democratic State Central Committee.

³¹Robinson to Vincent M. Miles, March 16, 1928, Robinson Papers.

scene or the speech. Heflin, for more than an hour, castigated the Catholic Church and Governor Smith. Robinson, his face a study in control and patience, sat on the first row of the Democratic side and listened intently. When Heflin finished, Robinson arose and scathingly denounced him "for his daily assaults on the Catholics of the country and on Governor Smith in particular." While the Alabaman fumed, "Robinson quietly and at times dramatically continued to lash his big colleague."³² Robinson's colleagues gave him their hearty support. Later L. C. Spears measured the significance of the event: "The Arkansan in that hour became a figure of more than State proportions. Senators on both sides of the Chamber agreed that it was one of the most courageous acts the Senate had witnessed in a decade, . . . That day marked the birth of the boom that led to nomination for the vice-presidency at Houston."³³

The Democratic National Committee met in Washington on January 12, 1928, and selected Houston for the 1928 convention site. This decision was promoted by Jesse H. Jones, financier, publisher of the Houston Chronicle, and treasurer of the national committee. Franklin D. Roosevelt urged Robinson and Jones to lay the groundwork so the Democratic

³²L. C. Spears, "Robinson a Sturdy Partner for Smith," New York Times, July 15, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

³³Ibid.

campaign could function smoothly when the party candidates were chosen.³⁴ On March 24, Robinson, Peter G. Gerry, Pittman, McAdoo, and Reed's campaign manager met at the Fifth Avenue home of Bernard M. Baruch for dinner and a discussion of the key personnel for the June Convention.³⁵ Baruch was friendly but not committed to Governor Smith. Late in April Robinson was chosen permanent chairman and Claude G. Bowers, editor of the New York World, the keynoter.

Robinson's selection as permanent chairman was logical. He had previously served as chairman at the San Francisco convention and was recognized as one of the best parliamentarians in the Senate. He was a man of powerful physique--big shouldered and heavy-armed--with the force necessary to dominate an unruly gathering, and he could be heard all over a convention hall without the aid of a microphone. Robinson was also friendly to Governor Smith, who was shaping up the party organization.³⁶

Chairman Clem Shaver of the Democratic National Committee, with the approval of the Smith forces, appointed Senator Pittman chairman of the Committee on Resolutions. Early in June, Pittman, with the aid of Smith's advisors,

³⁴Roosevelt to Robinson, March 14, 1928, Robinson Papers.

³⁵New York Times, March 26, 1928. Samuel W. Fordyce of St. Louis was Reed's campaign manager, Robinson Clippings.

³⁶Clinton W. Gilbert, "The Daily Mirror of Washington," Washington Post, n.d., ibid.

drew up the platform.³⁷ On June 16, Pittman and Judge Joseph M. Proskauer remodeled the entire platform in accordance with the suggestions made by Governor Smith.³⁸ During the writing of the platform Pittman wired Robinson that the Smith forces would not endorse the McNary-Haugen bill which Robinson had belatedly supported in the Senate, but would approve a "strong agricultural plank."³⁹ Later, the Committee on Platforms and Resolutions met in advance of the convention and finally agreed upon a definite platform.

June was convention month. The Republican Convention met in Kansas City, Missouri, on the 12th, and in a rather "dreary and dull" fashion proceeded to nominate Herbert Hoover for president. A "Stop Hoover" attempt by Lowden, Watson, Curtis, and Goff was ineffective. Senator Reed Smoot, well known as an advocate of a high protective tariff, drafted the platform in the interest of the "northeastern industrial elements" and ignored the agricultural relief demands of the corn-wheat belt for an equalization fee plan along the lines of the McNary-Haugen bill. Senator Charles Curtis, who had attacked the candidacy of Hoover just four

³⁷Mrs. Henry Moskowitz, a member of the Democratic Executive Committee and Director of Publicity; George Van Namee, pre-convention manager of Governor Smith's campaign and vice-chairman of the Executive Committee; and Judge Joseph M. Proskauer.

³⁸Key Pittman to Mrs. Henry Moskowitz, June 18, 1928, Robinson Papers.

³⁹Key Pittman to Robinson, telegram, June 18, 1928, ibid.

days before the convention, was nominated for the vice-presidency to lure the farm vote. George N. Peek and other agricultural leaders left Kansas City for Houston in hope of securing the inclusion of their program in the Democratic platform.⁴⁰

During June in the Democratic party, Pittman urged the Smith forces to consider Robinson as the vice-presidential candidate because of his known strength in Arkansas, Tennessee, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and Missouri. He said that Robinson was recognized presidential timber, that he had succeeded in obtaining the friendship and support of the Democratic factions in the Senate, but that he was still a party man who would follow the lead of Governor Smith.⁴¹

Robinson spent the first part of June preparing for the Democratic convention. He wrote his address, filled a few speaking engagements in Arkansas, rested, and fished. He left Little Rock on the "Joe T. Robinson Special," arriving in Houston at noon, June 24. The next day the United Commercial Travelers and the Travelers Protective Association gave a reception and dinner for 500 people to honor Robinson for his efforts in trying to secure the repeal of

⁴⁰Gilbert C. Fite, George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity (Norman, 1954), 203-06.

⁴¹Pittman to Mrs. Henry Moskowitz, June 18, 1928, Robinson Papers.

the Pullman fare surcharge.⁴²

The Convention assembled at Sam Houston Hall on June 26, 1928. Keynoter Bowers lived up to his reputation as a speaker. He praised the Wilson administration for its good legislation and its support of business; he condemned the Republican administration for eight years of corruption, privilege, and scandal. The higher tariff rates passed by the Republicans, he claimed, were responsible for the foreclosures of farms and the increased cost of manufactured goods to the farmer. He contrasted the "fake prosperity" of a few privileged and powerful corporations with the unemployment of the many; and he reminded his hearers of the numerous bank and commercial failures. Bowers closed by asking the American people to turn back to the fundamentals of constitutional liberty, justice, and equality.⁴³

On the second day, Robinson was escorted to the platform amid the applause of standing delegates. In a short address, he referred to the "notable political crisis" in selecting the Democratic candidates. He upheld the party's belief in a government of "equal rights and opportunities for all citizens." He pointed out the "sham prosperity" of

⁴²Houston Post-Dispatch, June 21, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁴³Charles A. Greathouse (compl.), Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, Houston, 1928 (Indianapolis, 1928), 14, 18. Hereafter cited as Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928.

the period by quoting figures on bank failures, on declining corporation profits, on increasing unemployment of laborers, and on shrinking values of farm commodities. The solution to the farm problem, he felt, lay in a reduction of the tariff on articles consumed by the farmer, in the exportation of farm surpluses, and in the application of the equalization fee found in the McNary-Haugen bill which had been twice vetoed by the President.

Taking the Republican party to task, he remarked that property would be safer with the Democrats in power for "there would be no danger of its being stolen by government agents." He castigated the Republicans for the lack of a clear-cut foreign policy and for the loss of international prestige. It appeared to Robinson that the leadership of the Wilson administration, abandoned by Harding, had not been restored by Coolidge. In pleading for party harmony, he suggested that no wet plank be incorporated in the platform. The Democratic party, he pointed out, was neither a prohibition nor an anti-prohibition party. He identified the party with the enforcement of the laws, the protection of "honest business men against the unfair and oppressive methods of monopoly," and the immediate agricultural relief of American farmers.

His closing remarks brought the convention to a "thunderous climax." He asked the Democrats to reconcile

their differences with the party by looking to Jefferson who "gloried in the Virginia statute of religious freedom and . . . rejoiced in the provision of the Constitution that declares no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for an office of trust in the United States."⁴⁴

For twenty minutes the delegates paraded in a spontaneous and unexpected demonstration after Robinson's remarks. Actually, they interrupted his speech--and he never did get to finish it!⁴⁵

That night Robinson introduced Franklin D. Roosevelt, who made the nominating speech for Governor Smith. Roosevelt praised Smith as having the qualities of leadership, experience, honesty, and the "ability to make popular government function as it was intended to by the [founding] fathers." He reviewed the record of Smith and closed with this bell-ringing eulogy:

America needs not only an administrator, but a leader--a pathfinder, a blazer of the trail to the high road that will avoid the bottomless morass of crass materialism that has engulfed so many of the great civilizations of the past. It is the privilege of democracy not only to offer such a man but to offer him as the surest leader to victory. . . . We offer one who has the will to win--who not only deserves success but commands it.

⁴⁴Ibid., 71-75.

⁴⁵Later Joe House asked Robinson why he did not finish his speech. Robinson replied that any additional remarks after the demonstration would be an anticlimax, and this was an excellent place to stop.

Victory is his habit--the happy warrior, Alfred E. Smith.⁴⁶

Nominating and seconding speeches for twelve other candidates continued that night and the following day.⁴⁷ On the first ballot Smith was declared the nominee of the party by more than the necessary two-thirds vote. Robinson announced the results and sent a telegram of congratulations to Smith.

A new political era dawned when Smith became the Democratic standard-bearer, or so thought The Literary Digest. Control of the party had passed "from the farm and the small town to the great cities, from the South to New York, and from the followers of Bryan and McAdoo to those of the Eastern leaders of the party."⁴⁸

Next came the selection of a running mate for Smith. The popular choice was Robinson. He was the party leader in the Senate, had the support of other influential Democrats, and was personally popular. He was a Protestant, a "dry," and by some considered a liberal from the Solid South.⁴⁹

⁴⁶Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928, 105.

⁴⁷These included Senators George of Georgia, Reed of Missouri, Harrison of Mississippi, Representative Hull of Tennessee, and Jesse H. Jones of Texas.

⁴⁸The Literary Digest, Vol. XCVII (July 7, 1928), 6.

⁴⁹Evidenced by "his stand against religious intolerance, . . . his liberal policy in foreign affairs, his support of the Child Labor Amendment, his vigorous assistance

Senator James Byrnes stated that Robinson's nomination was the only thing that the South Carolina delegation could agree upon wholeheartedly.⁵⁰ It was thought that the selection of Robinson could counteract the tremendous opposition to Smith in the South. He was acceptable to the Smith forces and was praised as a Smith booster at the Houston convention.⁵¹ Vice-President Dawes described his control of the convention as "masterful in its dignity and force."⁵² Colonel Joseph M. Hatfield sought the nomination for the vice presidency for Jesse H. Jones but Jones declined.⁵³ When Senator Reed announced on June 28 that he was not a candidate for the vice-presidency, Robinson was virtually assured of the nomination.⁵⁴

Listening over the radio to the proceedings of the Democratic National Convention at Houston, Dawes heard Robinson's speech. In his notes he commented:

to the investigation of the oil scandals, and his insistence that Secretary Denby should be dismissed from the Coolidge cabinet." The New Republic, Vol. LV (July 11, 1928), 182-183.

⁵⁰Interview, Grady Miller, Little Rock, April 16, 1954.

⁵¹Newspicture, Robinson Clippings.

⁵²Charles G. Dawes to Robinson, July 5, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁵³Bascom N. Timmons, Jesse H. Jones: The Man and the Statesman (New York, 1956), 147.

⁵⁴Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), June 28, 1928.

He is a man of great ability, of high character, of industry and of exceptional qualities as a leader of men. His courage is that of a lion. He never deceives and his decisions are quick but sound. His ideals are high, and he deserves to be rewarded with the best his party can give. It seems tonight that he will be nominated to succeed me in office, and I may say here that if he is elected, the place will not submerge him. I regard him as a statesman of high rank.⁵⁵

Although Robinson had made little effort to secure this honor, he agreed to be absent Friday morning. Pat Harrison, acting as chairman, recognized Senator Sam G. Bratton of New Mexico, who made the nominating speech. He praised Robinson's service during the Wilson administration and noted that "he enjoyed the personal confidence and sat in the official councils of Woodrow Wilson."⁵⁶ He closed by saying:

The man whom I present has served in public office for thirty-four years, and is only fifty-five years of age now. He has submitted himself and his record repeatedly to the people of his state and not a single time have they failed to register their emphatic approval and their abiding confidence in his sagacity, in his intellectuality, in his fidelity to the American people and their cause.

Scholarly, trained, polished, with a national and an international code, viewpoint, and understanding; diligent; faithful. Mr. Chairman and gentlemen of the convention, not one act of faithlessness has ever been found in the official record or in the hearts of mankind against the senior senator from Arkansas, the Honorable Joseph T. Robinson. (Applause).⁵⁷

Senator David I. Walsh of Massachusetts seconded the

⁵⁵Charles G. Dawes, Notes as Vice-President 1928-1929 (Boston, 1935), 5.

⁵⁶Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928, 233.

⁵⁷Ibid., 234.

nomination of Robinson. He pointed out that the convention had broken one precedent by selecting a Catholic as its candidate for president. He now asked them to shatter another precedent by destroying the spirit of sectionalism in selecting their vice-presidential candidate from the South. After noting that it had been sixty-eight years since any citizen of the South had been "a leading candidate of any major political party," Walsh added, "Though we may not be able to atone for our blindness of the past, we can stir a new hope in the breast of every southerner because of the restoration of real equality of opportunity to hold all public offices." He asked that the convention give to "the nation and Governor Smith as his associate an aggressive, courageous and progressive Democrat. . . ." ⁵⁸ Senator J. Hamilton Lewis of Illinois and others seconded the nomination. Robinson was chosen on the first ballot. ⁵⁹ He received 1035 of the 1099 votes cast. ⁶⁰

Al Smith later stated that he had left the choice of vice-president to the convention. But Alben W. Barkley records that the convention "followed Governor Smith's wishes

⁵⁸Ibid., 235.

⁵⁹General Henry T. Allen of Kentucky, Mrs. Nellie Taylor Ross of Wyoming, Alben W. Barkley of Kentucky, and Senator Duncan U. Fletcher of Florida were also nominated.

⁶⁰Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928, 252.

and nominated Senator Robinson."⁶¹ And Mayor Frank Hague of Jersey City said that 128 votes from the Northeast was what assured the nomination.⁶² Undoubtedly, Robinson had been selected before the convention met.

The convention closed with the reading of a startling acceptance telegram from Governor Smith. He repudiated a part of the platform just adopted and injected into the campaign the highly controversial question of prohibition and the repeal of the Eighteenth amendment in these words:

It is well known that I believe there should be fundamental changes in the present provisions for national prohibition, based, as I stated in my Jackson Day letter, on the fearless application to the problem of the principles of Jeffersonian democracy. While I fully appreciate that these changes can only be made by the people themselves through their elected legislative representatives, I feel it to be the duty of the chosen leader of the people to point the way which, in his opinion, leads to a sane, sensible solution of a condition which I am convinced is entirely unsatisfactory to the great mass of our people. (Applause). Common honesty compels us to admit that corruption of law enforcement officials, bootlegging, and lawlessness are now prevalent throughout this country. I am satisfied that without returning to the old evils that grew from the saloon, which years ago I held and still hold, was and ought always to be a defunct institution in this country, by the application of the Democratic principles of local self-government and states' rights, we can secure real temperance, respect for law, and eradication of the existing evils. In my formal acceptance of your nomination, I shall give

⁶¹Alfred E. Smith, Up to Now (New York, 1929), 379; Alben W. Barkley, That Reminds Me-- (Garden City, New York, 1954), 134; Dixon Merritt, "History Is Made at Houston," Outlook, Vol. CXLIX (July 11, 1928), 417.

⁶²Louis C. Hatch, A History of the Vice-Presidency of the United States (New York, 1934), 396.

to the people of the country my views in full upon all of the issues of the campaign . . .⁶³

Thus Alfred E. Smith, so astute in New York politics as to be elected four times as governor, threw political wisdom to the wind and braved the full fury of dry Protestant resistance. This action threatened to end his political career. Thus, before the campaign reached the starting line, Robinson perceived the growing difficulty in holding the South together.

Robinson received a rousing welcome in Little Rock upon his return, rested and then drove to the Arlington Hotel in Hot Springs to rest until August 30. Hot Springs seemed more eager to have the notification ceremony than Little Rock and provided rest, recreation, and freedom from official duties. With the aid of three stenographers, he answered many congratulatory messages. Barkley states: "Frankly, and from a personal standpoint, there is no man whose nomination could have given more satisfaction than yours, and I think your character and ability, and your standing throughout the country, adds materially to the dignity and appealing quality of the ticket."⁶⁴ Oscar W. Underwood, former Democratic leader of the Senate, expressed this thought: "You deserve the honor that has come to you for the faithful service you have

⁶³Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928, pp. 258-59.

⁶⁴Alben W. Barkley to Robinson, July 2, 1928, Robinson Papers.

rendered to your party. In my judgment your nomination was a wise one from every viewpoint, and the Democracy of the country is to be congratulated on having you on the ticket.

. . ."⁶⁵ Governor Ritchie penned this message: ". . . Please let me now congratulate you on the masterly way in which you presided over the convention and tell you how happy I am at your nomination for Vice-President."⁶⁶ Joseph P. Tumulty telegraphed that the boys in Washington were "enthusiastic for the ticket."⁶⁷

In the Republican party the vice-presidential nominee had many friends. Vice-President and Mrs. Dawes were delighted with the honor that came to Senator and Mrs. Robinson by the "overwhelming demand" of the convention, and added "You were wise to accept--one should never step aside when in the path of on-coming events. It would have been an avoidance of duty--and that is never considered by a man like you. . . . I am happy at anything good that comes to you, for I regard you as a dear and faithful friend. . . ."⁶⁸ Senator Arthur H. Vandenburg of Michigan wrote facetiously that he hoped the Arkansan would be "magnificently defeated." But if

⁶⁵Oscar W. Underwood to Robinson, June 30, 1928, ibid.

⁶⁶Albert C. Ritchie to Robinson, July 2, 1928, ibid.

⁶⁷Joseph P. Tumulty to Robinson, Telegram, July 2, 1928, ibid.

⁶⁸Charles G. Dawes to Robinson, July 5, 1928, ibid.

a Democratic victory must occur, he would be "entirely delighted" to have him "figure as a prominent part of the picture."⁶⁹ He concluded his editorial in the Grand Rapids Herald with these words:

Senator Robinson himself is an inherently honest, tremendously able, admirably high-minded, brilliantly intellectual statesman who well merits the honor of a place on his party's national ticket. He enjoys the unbounded respect of his Senatorial colleagues, and is undeniably one of the country's most distinguished Democrats. Democracy has not weakened its ticket in the choice of Governor Smith's running-mate.⁷⁰

The Democratic press of the country approved Al Smith's running-mate. The Hartford Times called it the best ticket since 1916. The Cleveland Plain Dealer believed Robinson qualified to fill the presidency in case of an emergency. The Savannah Morning News felt that he combined "all the elements which go to make up the ideal second-place on a Smith ticket."⁷¹

The Republican papers were not so kind. The Albany Evening News viewed his selection as a "sop to the South and the drys and the farmers."⁷² McCutcheon in the Chicago Tribune cartooned the Senator as running away from the Southern

⁶⁹Arthur H. Vandenburg to Robinson, July 5, 1928, ibid.

⁷⁰Grand Rapids Herald, editorial, n.d., Robinson Clippings.

⁷¹"Political Strategy Is Seen by Press in Selection of Senator Robinson," Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), July 9, 1928.

⁷²Ibid.

dry camp to the welcoming New York wet camp for "political expediency" and leaving behind "his convictions."⁷³

Henry F. Pringle called him "a middle-of-the-road harmonizer and a dry. . . . Politically, he might be the twin brother of Senator Curtis."⁷⁴ The Nation viewed the Democratic ticket as a choice of Tweedledum and Tweedledee: "All the Drys can happily vote for Robinson, all the Wets for Smith. All the believers in democracy can vote for Smith; all who believe that Americans are not created free and equal if the shades of their skins are darker can vote for Robinson."⁷⁵ It identified Robinson's leadership in the Senate as "infinitely inferior" to that of Progressives in the Republican party. It further described him as "a typical Southern politician put on the ticket for the purpose of catching some guileless Drys."⁷⁶ The New Republic had little enthusiasm for the Democratic Senate Leader in its comments:

The Democrats were a little happier than the Republicans in their vice-presidential selection though there is not much to choose between Senator Robinson and his dear friend Senator Curtis. The naming of the Senator from Arkansas was clearly a sop thrown to the old South, forced to swallow such a bitter pill as Al Amith. It was a necessary choice, and taking one of the Western

⁷³Cartoons, Robinson Clippings.

⁷⁴Henry F. Pringle, "Harmony--and a Man of Courage," Outlook, Vol. CXLIX (July 11, 1928), 412.

⁷⁵The Nation, Vol. CXXVII (July 11, 1928), 27.

⁷⁶Ibid.

progressive Democrats probably would have been better politics, but it was tactful. . . . What could be said of the Republican selection of Curtis can also be said of the choice of Robinson: They might have done worse; but they might also have done ever so much better.⁷⁷

The party leaders quickly turned their attention to the organization of the coming campaign. Senator Robinson and Jesse H. Jones discussed party policies with Governor Smith in Albany on July 9 before the National Committee meeting in New York on the 11th. As the train stopped in Albany, the Governor crossed the tracks to greet them with a smile and a firm handclasp while he mopped his brow and neck with a handkerchief. The Albany partisans applauded Joe and Al as, arm in arm, they approached the station platform to the strains of "Arkansas Traveler," "East Side, West Side," and "How Dry I Am." Before the surging, shirt-sleeved crowd Robinson remarked, "It may not be as dry here as in Arkansas, but it sure is just as hot." Thousands lined the streets as they toured the city. Pictures of the nominees observing a donkey and feeding the monkeys appeared in the rotogravure sections of leading Sunday newspapers.⁷⁸

Smith and Robinson conferred briefly on the organization of the National Committee campaign plans⁷⁹ with Jones,

⁷⁷The New Republic, Vol. LV (July 11, 1928), 182-83.

⁷⁸New York Times, July 10, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁷⁹Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), July 9, 1928.

Pittman, National Committeeman Scott Ferris, and Norman E. Mack, Buffalo publisher. Robinson and Jones arrived in New York City on July 9 and registered at the Mayfair House.

The next morning Robinson urged the National Committee to establish a regional headquarters, in order to check "an organized effort in several Southern States to defeat the Democratic national ticket." He added, "Conditions in that section are very different from those which have prevailed in other national campaigns."⁸⁰ But the National Committee rejected his idea because southern committeemen wanted to hold the leadership in their respective states. The members believed that everyone was "coming into line with the exception of a few preachers and a few klansmen" and that to establish such regional centers would be "a confession of weakness."⁸¹

Smith had personally selected the new officers of the National Committee. His advisors represented a close clique of Eastern industrialists and financiers who hoped to assure big business of the soundness of the Democratic policy.⁸²

⁸⁰New York Times, July 11, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁸¹Robinson to Frederick I. Thompson, July 28, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁸²The new national committee officers were: Democratic National Chairman, John J. Raskob, an official of General Motors and board member and Vice President of DuPont; Chairman of the Finance Committee, an old Jewish friend,

Robinson was disturbed by the actions of John J. Raskob, the most controversial figure among the new officers. He was described by James O'Donnel Gennett of the Chicago Tribune as "a militant Catholic, a militant wet, and the personification of big business . . ."⁸³ The new chairman offended some Southern Democrats by his stand on the liquor question and his determination to make the repeal of prohibition the main issue in the 1928 campaign. This attempt to unite the opposition to the Eighteenth Amendment under the banner of Democracy encouraged the bolting of Democrats throughout the South.⁸⁴ Thus the Senator saw his party's problems multiply. Yet in the interest of party harmony he stated in Washington, D. C., on July that he was pleased with the political outlook. He described the meeting of the National Committee as "harmonious" and "quite effective." He praised Raskob as "an outstanding figure in the business world" with a "genius for organization." He added:

It is gratifying to take note of the decisive manner in which the initiatory steps have been taken. . . . My

Herbert P. Lehman, investment banker, philanthropist, and director of many corporations; Treasurer, James W. Gerard, author, ex-Ambassador to Germany, and former member of the New York Supreme Court. As a balm to millionaire Peter G. Gerry, Senator from Rhode Island, Raskob made him chairman of "the advisory campaign committee."

⁸³Chicago Tribune, July 12, 1928; New York Times, July 12, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁸⁴M. M. Crane to John J. Raskob, July 16, 1928, Robinson Papers.

reception, both in Albany and in New York City, exceeded in cordiality and enthusiasm the expectations of my most sanguine friends. In New York, where Governor Smith has served as chief executive for many years, he is admired and loved by the people beyond any other public man of his generation. His sterling honesty and sincere attachment to the welfare and best interests of the general public seem to be the basis for his popularity.⁸⁵

The Senator returned to Hot Springs on July 15 and remained in Arkansas until August 18. During this period he made some addresses; rested for several days at the rustic log-cabin lodge of Harvey C. Couch, president of the Arkansas Power and Light; met the state's political leaders; wrote his acceptance speech; and received callers at his Hotel Arlington suite.

He frankly asked Raskob whether it was "necessary or desirable" for him to attend Smith's notification ceremony. He did not want his "failure to be there to become the basis of any comment or discussion."⁸⁶ When it appeared that people of the East wanted to see the running-mate of Al Smith, Robinson left for Albany on August 18 to attend the ceremony.

On Monday morning in New York City, Robinson outlined his speaking itinerary with the Advisory Committee and Senators Pat Harrison and Millard Tydings of the Democratic Speakers Bureau. Robinson knew his most effective efforts must be in the South and West, yet his only previous commit-

⁸⁵Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 13, 1928.

⁸⁶Robinson to Raskob, July 27, 1928, Robinson Papers.

ment was a Labor Day speech in Dallas.

On Tuesday the Senate leader discussed his tour with Raskob who approved the program and cleared his acceptance speech. On this occasion he tried to counsel Raskob on "a full understanding of conditions in the South."⁸⁷ He warned Raskob of the unfavorable reaction in the South over his stand on the prohibition issue⁸⁸ and privately expressed the belief that his acceptance remarks as chairman had been "unnecessary, inadvisable, and quite harmful in the South . . ."⁸⁹ However, one cardinal point should be remembered: Robinson limited his discussion of party differences to members of the party alone, and he sought zealously to keep all factions working together.

That night the Robinsons motored to Hyde Park to be overnight guests of the Roosevelts, who were taking an active part in the campaign. Franklin D. Roosevelt served on the Executive Committee; and Eleanor Roosevelt, on the Advisory Committee. At a meeting of the Dutchess County Democratic committee in the Roosevelt home, Robinson made this comment: "The campaign against Al Smith thus far has not been creditable to the traditions of the American people. It has been

⁸⁷Robinson to Frederick Thompson, August 7, 1928, ibid.

⁸⁸Robinson to Raskob, August 10, 1928, ibid.

⁸⁹Robinson to Frederick Thompson, August 7, 1928, ibid.

a whispering, insinuating and slandering campaign. Not since Andrew Jackson has there been a man so close to the men and women of this country."⁹⁰ The next morning the Roosevelts and the Robinsons drove to Albany.

The day of the notification (August 22) was marred by a steady rain. At the last moment an indoor meeting was deemed necessary, and a battalion of workmen prepared the Assembly Hall for the exercises. A radio network of 90 stations carried the proceedings. Only 2,000 persons could crowd into the limited space, but many remained outside in the rain to listen over the amplifying system. A little after six o'clock a "wild shout" greeted Senator and Mrs. Robinson as they entered the hall and took seats on the rostrum. A few minutes later Governor Smith was greeted with a deafening burst of applause.⁹¹

Smith's speech was statesmanlike in its expression, general in its application, constructive in its solution of national problems, and free of petty accusations. He drew applause as he touched on foreign relations, the prohibition amendment, and the farm relief program. His coverage exceeded that of the party platform.⁹²

⁹⁰Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 22, 1928.

⁹¹Ibid., August 23, 1928.

⁹²St. Louis Post Dispatch, August 23, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

The vice-presidential nominee warmly praised Smith's address and declared it to be a "frank, clear, and fearless" enunciation of the party's principles on all national questions.⁹³

That night the Robinsons and the Pittmans were guests of Governor and Mrs. Smith. Later Mrs. Robinson described her hostess as "gracious, sweet, refined, and very companionable."⁹⁴ The women's Democratic organizations of Greater New York honored the nominees and their wives Thursday with a reception at Hotel Astor. Then the Arkansans returned to Hot Springs for the vice-presidential notification exercises.

Hot Springs citizens made every effort to have the city ready for the occasion. Colonel Edwin A. Halsey, sergeant-at-arms for the Democratic National Committee, arrived to supervise the final preparations. "Al and Joe" posters, colorful buntings inscribed with the slogan "Our Own Joe, the Next Vice-President," and long streamers gave the city a festive appearance. KTHS increased its power and served as the key station in the national broadcast. A huge platform flanked by large oil paintings of Smith and Robinson was provided; and seats for 24,000 filled the area in front of the Arlington. Governor Parnell proclaimed August 30 a special holiday.

⁹³Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), August 26, 1928.

⁹⁴Miami Herald, September, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

National Headquarters decided that Smith would not attend the notification because his presence might detract from the honors due the Senator.⁹⁵ The latter was disappointed over this decision but realized "fully the basis for the conclusion." He knew that Smith's "presence would tend to overshadow other features of the program," but believed his presence would have had a "very valuable effect."⁹⁶

The great celebration was ushered in with cheerless weather. Donald McGregor, press agent of the National Democratic party, telegraphed a melancholy message to New York that "a drizzling rain was falling in Hot Springs almost exactly like the rain in Albany. . . ."⁹⁷

Crowds estimated from 10,000 to 20,000 milled around in the rain all day. Umbrellas decorated the natural amphitheater in front of the Arlington and along the famous Bath House Row. One cheerful omen occurred about two hours before the ceremony: a rainbow appeared over South Mountain. Half a dozen bands kept the celebrative spirit alive, and dozens of flood lights were turned on to highlight the occasion. As the Arkansas National Guard passed in review, Robinson in dark-striped trousers, cutaway coat, and wing collar appeared

⁹⁵Raskob to Robinson, July 24, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁹⁶Robinson to Raskob, July 27, 1928, ibid.

⁹⁷McGregor to J. J. Cannavan, Telegram, August 30, 1928, ibid.

on the platform.⁹⁸

Claude G. Bowers delivered a forceful notification address. In appealing "for less centralization and more self-government, less bureaucracy and more democracy . . . , less red tape and more red blood, less privilege and more equality," and less corruption and more faithful performance in public service, he pictured the nation as having been without leadership during the past seven years; he then named Smith as one possessing courage, honesty, and vision. He criticized the administration for a lack of responsiveness to the needs of the people and pointed to the Democratic proposal to make the government "an organized agency of human welfare."

Bowers praised the South for its past leaders in the Democratic party, which now returned to the Southland to select one of its "most gifted and thoroughly tested" sons. Then facing the nominee, he closed with this brilliant peroration:

Your fellow Democrats turned to you, Senator Robinson, because of your seasoned statesmanship, your established leadership, the robust quality of your democracy, the Jeffersonian character of your political concepts, and your fine fidelity to American ideals. . . . You have stood for the ideals of the nation, for the conscience and the liberties of the people, and for a

⁹⁸Others on the platform included Bowers; Raskob; ex-Governor Ross; Mrs. John B. Warner, daughter and official representative of Smith; Senator Hawes of Missouri; Governor Harvey Parnell and Senator Caraway of Arkansas; Mrs. Robinson; Mrs. Jess Miller, her mother; and Arkansas political leaders.

militant championship of those principles and policies that we believe essential to the welfare of the state. In presenting you with this notification and commission, the highest testimonial of public confidence, and bidding you go forth to battle for the cause, we know that in accordance with your custom, you will fight the good fight, and keep the faith, and contribute mightily to the inevitable victory in November.⁹⁹

In his acceptance speech at Hot Springs, Robinson set the stage for his national campaign tour. He lashed out at those who would spread slander and libel among the people and described these partisan maligners as "numerous political serpents . . . hissing in the dark and striking from cover, and with venomous malice seeking to poison the thoughts and arouse the prejudice of those who will decide issues of far reaching importance." Promising the voters a "frank and fearless discussion of the issues and records," he developed his address around four topics: the agricultural policy of the two parties, the prohibition issue and its enforcement, the maintenance of the merchant marine, and the political corruption in the federal government.

The most important issue Robinson felt was a solution to the problems of agriculture. He reviewed the defeated agricultural legislation of the previous Republican administrations. The Republican Party, he concluded, was either incapable of successfully dealing with the question or had deliberately violated its expressed promises to the nation's farmers.

⁹⁹Official Report of the Proceedings, 1928, 287-89.

Robinson introduced a new element into acceptance speeches by dealing directly with personalities, singling out Hoover as largely responsible for the failure of agricultural measures: "Mr. Hoover . . . is perhaps more directly responsible for the failure of farm relief legislation . . . than any other single political leader."

His analysis of Hoover's three suggested measures of legislation for farm relief showed complete disagreement. Robinson rejected the tariff as inadequate to protect United States agricultural products produced in quantities for the world markets, he deprecated the development of cheap transportation through construction of inland waterways, and he pointed out the failure of the Republican Congress to legislate any plan of farm relief which would stimulate cooperative marketing by the advancement of federal credits. In a summary, he stated that the Democratic party repudiated "Mr. Hoover's proposal to limit farm production to the domestic demand;" that the party recognized "the right of farmers to lead in the development of farm policies;" that it would seek adequate credit facilities and better administration of the Farm Loan system; and that it would favor the creation of a Federal Farm Board to finance co-operative associations to deal with crop surpluses.

Robinson supported the equalization fee plan of the McNary-Haugen bill but hoped for a more equitable and effective plan; he now hinted at a departure into new fields of

legislation by saying: "The time has come, however, when an economic adventure is justified in behalf of the millions who engage in that industry without which civilization could not survive." On the whole, Robinson had no clear solution to the farm problem. Similarly, the Democratic policy and platform were indefinite.

On the question of prohibition he took an opportunistic position: for 25 years he had represented the dry South; on the other side Al Smith stood with the wet East. Robinson straddled the issue by stating that "there had always been room in the Democratic party for those who differed as to the best means of promoting temperance and of suppressing the traffic in alcoholic beverages . . . The Houston convention recognized that the Democratic party is neither a prohibition nor an anti-prohibition organization, but if entrusted with power its duty would be to enforce all laws." Robinson insisted that the question was moral and economic, not merely political, and that it should not be raised as a political issue by either party.

Robinson stated his belief that an adequate merchant marine was "essential to the safety of the nation and the independence of its commerce," and accused the Republicans of "reckless sacrifice and favoritism" in the disposal of this war-built fleet.

His last topic covered the political corruption with-

in the Republican administrations of the previous eight years, particularly the failure to discharge derelict officers in the departments of Justice, Navy, and Interior and in the Veterans Bureau and Alien Property Custodian's office. In contrast, the numerous committee investigations of the Wilson administration had never disclosed any "breach of trust," or any "instance of dishonesty on the part of any Democratic office holder." In upholding Governor Smith's record, which had withstood "hostile scrutiny" and partisan investigation, the Senator revealed him as an extraordinary executive, who could be "expected to safeguard the government against such thieves and crooks as have plundered it during recent years." The vice-presidential nominee concluded by inviting those of every political faith to join the Democratic party in the reformation of the administration of national affairs.¹⁰⁰

Thus Robinson's address filled the chief requirement of an acceptance speech: he had pleased as many as he could and had offended as few as possible.

Editorials across the nation overwhelmingly approved his acceptance speech. The New York Times praised his "remarks about keeping the campaign clean and avoiding secret and sinister methods of influencing voters. . . ." The Arkansas Democrat called it a "straight-from-the-shoulder enunciation of principles of the Democratic party. . . ." The

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 289-300.

Washington Post commented: "His speech accepting the vice-presidential nomination may well be taken as the platform of Democrats in this campaign, particularly his clear and honest exposition of the prohibition question." The Evening Star remarked: "It is evident . . . that his role in the campaign is to be that of a missionary in the farm belt." It continued by noting that Robinson's position on prohibition was "strategically sound" because of the factions in the party. On the other hand, the Chattanooga News held that his role on the prohibition question was helpful in seeking to make Smith's views palatable to the people of the South. The Independent, a national weekly, labeled the acceptance speech as one full of generalities. He flunked "miserably," it said, as to constructive suggestions for agricultural relief. Furthermore, the Southerner had played "both ends against the middle" on the prohibition issue and when reduced to printer's ink his speech had made "very little contribution to the progress of the campaign."¹⁰¹ However, editors generally agreed that his oratorical powers and impressive physique would draw crowds and win votes.

¹⁰¹The Independent, Vol. CXXI (September 8, 1928), 218.

CHAPTER VIII

ARKANSAS CAMPAIGN IN 1928

The first phase of Robinson's national campaign tour centered in his July-August canvass of Arkansas. Several factors made this necessary. First, the prospective Democratic vote of Arkansas had to be large enough to remove any doubt of its support of the national ticket. If a plausible rumor could be circulated by the Republicans that Robinson could not carry his own state, his national effectiveness would be destroyed. Second, Robinson wanted to test his campaign methods on the people of Arkansas before he made his Southern tour. Their reaction would aid him in organizing his political attack. Lastly, if defeated, Robinson would want to run for re-election to the Senate in 1930; and he did not want a poor showing on the national ticket to be used against him by any political opponent. Speaking eight times in the state before some 70,000 people, he emphasized the personality, career, and public service of Governor Smith, defended his views on religion and prohibition, and appealed to the Arkansas Democrats to support the national ticket.

At Arkansas State Teachers College in Conway, Robinson made a bid for the school vote by pointing to Smith's support of the New York teachers' retirement program and the increased school appropriations in that state. He discounted the idea of a possible priest-dominated public school system.¹ His Fourth of July speech in Little Rock parried the influence of the Protestant ministry by a plea for religious tolerance. One of his remarks received international attention: "The age of bigotry has passed. The battalions that advance under the black banners of intolerance can never undermine or destroy the fortress of Liberty."² At Pine Bluff, the nominee built up Smith's acceptability by identifying him as a benefactor to the masses and a great American statesman who was loved by his followers and admired even by the leaders of the Republican party.³ In an unscheduled appearance before the Garland County Democratic Central Committee at Hot Springs, the Arkansan denounced the circulation of base rumors and condemned party bolters such as Owen of Oklahoma. He defended his own position on the ticket by declaring that in his 25 years of public service there was never a single

¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 18, 1928; Address, Conway, Arkansas, July 17, 1928, Robinson Papers.

²Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), July 4, 1928; Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 5, 1928.

³Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock) and Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 19, 1928; address, Pine Bluff, Arkansas, July 18, 1928, Robinson Papers.

hour in which he did not have before him the honor and the best interests of his state.⁴ At the Hope (Arkansas) water-melon festival, before 30,000 people, he attacked the Tammany bogey by referring to the society's friendship for the South during reconstruction days; he also upheld Smith as free from the "Shackles" of this organization.⁵ Before a home-coming crowd at Lonoke, he pulled from Smith the cloak of Roman Catholicism and described his religion as "simple and old-fashioned."⁶

However, by July Arkansas political leaders saw that it would take more than Robinson's speeches to keep the state in line.⁷ Considerable political and religious dissension had formed and it was apparent that such opposition might solidify and cause serious trouble in November. During July, the Democratic State Central Committee threatened to bar from the state primary in August all Democrats who failed to support Smith, and in October refused to place on the ballot any Democratic nominee for state or county office who did

⁴Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 8, 1928.

⁵Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 10, 1928; New York Sun, August 10, 1928; Address, Hope, Arkansas, August 9, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁶Address, Lonoke, Arkansas, August 31, 1928, ibid.

⁷J. S. Utley to Robinson, July 5, 1928, ibid.

not pledge his support to the national ticket.⁸

Judge A. L. Hutchins of Forrest City wrote Robinson on July 18 that he observed a "rising tide of ecclesiastical opposition" and suggested to the Senator that outstanding Democrats meet to organize a statewide Smith-Robinson club.⁹ Three days later Chairman J. S. Utley of the State Central Committee and others were quietly planning to stop this clerical defection;¹⁰ Robinson, Joe House, his law partner, "Vint" Miles, national committeeman, and Harvey C. Couch also met to discuss this problem.

Joe House had organized this efficient political "machine" in 1924 to relieve Robinson of re-election worries. This "machine," served by some of the outstanding citizens in each county, was still the key political organization in the state.¹¹ Also, the newly elected Democratic gubernatorial candidate Judge John Martineau, a relative of Robinson, agreed to select the new members of the State Central Committee only from those who were enthusiastic supporters of

⁸Fletcher Chenault to Washington Star, July 21, 1928; and Minutes of the Meeting of the Democratic State Central Committee, October 16, 1928, Hotel Marion, Little Rock, ibid.

⁹A. L. Hutchins to Robinson, July 18, 1928, ibid.

¹⁰J. S. Utley to Robinson, July 21, 1928, ibid.

¹¹Interview, Joe W. House, August 11, 1953, Little Rock.

the national ticket.¹²

On July 31, twenty-five Democrats from every section of the state met with Senator Robinson at the Arlington Hotel. The list of those present read like a "Who's Who" in Arkansas politics.¹³ This committee planned to unite the loyal Democrats in a state-wide organization known as the Democratic Victory Legion. Its purpose was to check Democrats from bolting the party, to "combat the false and malicious propaganda" being spread by the Republicans, and to turn out the full Democratic vote at the national election in November. State headquarters at Little Rock provided campaign literature, badges, automobile stickers, speakers, and advice to county and township chairmen.

At this meeting a chairman was selected for each county. He was to be responsible for the selection of town-

¹²R. W. Robins to Vincent M. Miles, July 26, 1928; telegram, H. L. Lambert to Robinson, October 6, 1928, Robinson Papers.

¹³Senator T. H. Caraway, Jonesboro; Vincent M. Miles, National Committeeman, Fort Smith; Miss Alice Cordell, National Committeewoman, El Dorado; Judge J. S. Utley, Little Rock; Joe K. Mahoney, El Dorado; R. N. Robbins, Conway; Sam Rorex, Russellville; Heartsill Ragon, Clarksville; Joe House, Little Rock; A. L. Hutchins, Forrest City; Allen Wilson, Fayetteville; W. E. Floyd, Little Rock; W. H. Martin, Hot Springs; Judge Robert Williams, Pine Bluff; Perry Chappel, Prescott; Lamar Williamson, Monticello; Thomas C. Trimble, Jr., Lonoke; H. L. Ponder, Walnut Ridge; W. B. Sorrels, Jr., Pine Bluff; W. H. McLeod, Pine Bluff; Dave Partain, Van Buren; A. D. Dulaney, Ashdown; and H. L. Lambert, Little Rock. Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), August 1, 1928.

ship chairman in his county and for the direction of the county organization. The township chairman was the actual "contact" man who was to see that every Democrat had an opportunity to sign a pledge card of loyalty to the national ticket. These pledge cards were to be sent to state headquarters for filing.¹⁴

The county chairmen were also directed to send large delegations to the notification ceremony, to attend a conference in Hot Springs on the same date, and to furnish a list of newspapers and publishers who would be willing to print articles in support of the party. Such action was without precedent since the days of Radical Reconstruction.

Upon the request of Robinson, Vint Miles and Senator Hawes, regional chairman, appointed Congressman Heartsill Ragon of the Fifth District to manage the Democratic Campaign in Arkansas.¹⁵ So confident was Robinson of the ability of the organization to carry the state that he wrote Raskob on August 10 that he could "dismiss Arkansas" from his list of troubles.¹⁶

The Protestant ministers, however, were not willing to be dismissed so lightly. The Methodist Conference and

¹⁴Pamphlet, "Confidential Announcement," published by the Democratic Victory Legion, Little Rock, Arkansas, Robinson Papers.

¹⁵Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), August 31, 1928.

¹⁶Robinson to John J. Raskob, August 10, 1928, Robinson Papers.

the Arkansas Baptist Convention advocated the use of the pulpit to turn their members against the Democratic ticket. Reverend Selsus Tull spoke before a crowd of 10,000 in Little Rock and said that Robinson was guilty of ingratitude in calling those citizens "bigots" who had voted him into office.¹⁷ A Baptist minister Ben H. Bogard viewed the Senator's nomination as an insult instead of an honor since Robinson was on the ticket with a Tammany man.

The Democratic nominee repeatedly denounced these political sermons. He felt that the Protestant ministers, the Klansmen, and Anti-Saloon Leaguers were working in close harmony with the Republican party, and that an expose of this alleged relationship would destroy all opposition to the ticket in Arkansas.¹⁸

In Fort Smith, fifteen members of the Protestant Ministers Association signed a statement protesting the candidacy of Smith because of his stand on the liquor issue and called on the Christian men and women "to save the nation from this threatening calamity."¹⁹

Dr. John Roach Straton, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church, New York City, spoke to a capacity filled grandstand

¹⁷Ibid., July 27, 1928.

¹⁸Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 10, 1928.

¹⁹Southwest-American (Fort Smith, Arkansas), July 20, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

at the Little Rock Fair Park on September 18. He asked the "dry" Democrats to vote for Hoover and identified Tammany Hall as a stronghold of corruption. He charged that Smith was reared in an "environment of saloons, gambling dens, race tracks and houses of ill-fame" and showed that his record as assemblyman and governor of New York favored the liquor, gambling, and race track interests. Dr. Straton denied Robinson's statement that Smith would be powerless to change the national prohibition laws, and "declared that the chief executive through his appointments of the attorney general, United States district attorney, and members of the Supreme Court of the United States would be able to bring about a virtual nullification of the Eighteenth Amendment if he so desired."²⁰ When it was rumored that Dr. Straton would be pelted with eggs, the Robinson supporters, not wanting any more unfavorable publicity to develop from this meeting, had 100 policemen placed on duty to keep the crowd orderly.

One bitter conflict over the Smith-Robinson ticket occurred within the Senator's own church, the First Methodist, between the Board of Stewards and its minister, the Reverend H. D. Knickerbocker. From the pulpit on July 15, the pastor charged that the Senator was "bearing down hard on the doctrine of tolerance for political purposes." He continued:

²⁰Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), September 19, 1928; New York Times, August 27, 1928, ibid.

He has a splendid opportunity to preach tolerance to the Roman Catholic Church, which is largely responsible for the intolerance exhibited toward Protestantism. Let them preach reciprocal tolerance. Let them direct the preaching where it is most needed. It is said to be one of Governor Smith's political tricks to place his opponents on the defensive. Senator Robinson is assisting in putting Protestantism on the defensive by preaching tolerance, as if Protestants were the only ones guilty of intolerance.²¹

He praised Hoover as representative of the best in American life and asked prohibitionists to support him. The minister took the State Central Committee to task for attempting to drive anti-Smith Democrats out of the party because they would not submit to the dictates of the state bosses.

The Senator's friends refused to let this attack go unanswered. In an open letter to the Senator, 64 church board members stated that they regretted any criticism that might have been directed from their pulpit toward him. They expressed great pride in his record and applauded his recent utterances on the Senate floor in defense of religious liberty. They were grateful for the honor that he had brought the state and to the South, and heartily endorsed him. This letter was published under the caption, "Pastor Rebuked for Robinson Attacks--Knickerbocker Criticised by Church Board."²²

Reverend Knickerbocker, vacationing at Hackensack, Minnesota, made a caustic reply by challenging any of the

²¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 16, 1928.

²²Ibid., August 5, 1928; Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), August 4, 1928.

signers to write a letter commending the record of Smith, the corruptness of Tammany, or the historic intolerance of Romanism. He had already asked for his transfer from Little Rock because he could not "go down the line of least resistance," as some of his church leaders desired.²³

By August the opposition of the ministers began to subside. Fred Heiskell gave space in the Arkansas Gazette to allow radical preachers and laymen to get the "fanaticism out of their systems."²⁴ In September, Vincent Miles commented that around Fort Smith most of the ministers were no longer preaching political sermons from the pulpit.²⁵ But while the Arkansas ministers ceased their public attacks before the election, they almost unanimously voted against the national ticket.²⁶

Although the local Protestant ministers criticized Robinson's leadership, the citizens of Lonoke and Lonoke County maintained their affection for him. The Homecoming Day celebration of August 31 marked the close of the Arkansas campaign tour. Rains forced the celebration indoors. There,

²³Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), August 14, 1928.

²⁴Fred Heiskell to Robinson, July 31, 1928, Robinson Papers.

²⁵Vincent Miles to Robinson, September 19, 1928, ibid.

²⁶Interview, William H. Gregory, Little Rock, August 12, 1953. Mr. Gregory, former Baptist minister and later assistant United States district attorney, stated that he knew of only two Protestant ministers in Arkansas who voted the Democratic ticket in 1928.

in the overcrowded auditorium of Lonoke High School, old friends and former teachers, along with Senators Harris and George of Georgia and Caraway of Arkansas came to praise him. This type of meeting was to Robinson's liking, for he could bring tears to many eyes as he recalled the days of his childhood or could hurl defiance at those who would attack the Democratic ticket.²⁷ At the close of his address hundreds pressed near to greet him; and after a short visit in the homes of relatives, the Robinsons returned to Hot Springs. And thus ended Lonoke's "greatest day in history."

The Arkansan hoped he had been able to keep his native state from voting Republican in November and to close the gap in the Democratic ranks. He believed the first phase of his national campaign had been successful; and he now felt secure and ready for the larger task ahead.

²⁷Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), September 1, 1928; Home-Coming Address, Lonoke, Arkansas, August 31, 1928, Robinson Papers.

CHAPTER IX

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN IN 1928

Robinson conducted an able and arduous national campaign. From September 3 to November 5 he delivered sixty scheduled speeches, made one hundred and fifty-seven rear platform appearances, and traveled more than twenty-five thousand miles.¹ He spoke in all the Southern states except Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana; in all the states west of the Mississippi River except Montana; and in the east central states of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and West Virginia.

The Senator traveled by private railroad car. Harry Robinson, business manager of the Southwest American, Fort Smith (and no relation of the candidate), was advance agent of the national committee and organized the scheduled meetings with the local arrangement committees.² The Senator's entourage included C. K. Bothwell, passenger agent of the Missouri-Pacific; Donald McGregor, veteran political writer;

¹Robinson to Raskob, telegram, November 3, 1928, Robinson Papers.

²H. Grady Miller to Ben L. Moore, September 20, 1928, ibid.

J. Fred McClerkin, his Washington secretary; press writer Chamberlin; and Mrs. Robinson.³

On his Southern tour, extending through the first three weeks of September, the nominee delivered fourteen major addresses in eight states. At the request of Texas political leaders, he spoke to a Labor Day crowd at Dallas on September 3, and at Cisco the following day. On the 6th and 7th he was in Tennessee speaking at Nashville and Chattanooga, and on the 10th at Richmond, Virginia. In North Carolina he spoke at Raleigh and Charlotte. The latter address, given wholly to agriculture, was subsequently distributed as campaign literature by the national headquarters. Robinson was the first national candidate since William Jennings Bryan to visit the definitely Democratic state of South Carolina, and his address at Columbia on the 13th was carried over a southern network of seventeen radio stations. His next major stop was Savannah, Georgia, which was added to his speaking tour at the insistence of Georgia Democrats. In Florida, the Minority Leader spoke at Jacksonville. Scheduled appearances at Atlanta and Bowling Green were cancelled because storms, accompanying a hurricane which struck Florida while his party was at Miami, had softened roadbeds and destroyed bridges. Principal addresses in Kentucky included

³Donald McGregor to H. Grady Miller, July 2, 1928, ibid.

Owensboro, Paducah, and Mayfield. Traveling across Tennessee and Arkansas, he made several platform speeches and arrived in Little Rock on the night of September 22.

The Senator's trip through the South was designed to boost the drooping morale and the sagging activities of the state Democratic organizations. His campaign methods were vigorous, defiant, and sincere. He did not limit himself to the text before him, but often pushed it aside and launched into an extemporaneous speech that furnished color and headlines for the papers. His remarks were tempered to each occasion and tailored to the needs of each state. Even Robinson was surprised at the enthusiastic reception he received at each stop. At Columbia, South Carolina, "the audience became hysterical at the end of the meeting and almost mobbed him in trying to express their appreciation."⁴ No auditorium was adequate for the audiences that sometimes numbered ten to fifteen thousand, not including those listening to the radio.⁵

The Senator's aggressive campaign tactics reflected his concern over the success of the national ticket. The opposition of Protestant ministers, the lukewarm support or party bolting of Southern senators such as Thomas Heflin of

⁴Robinson to Millard E. Tydings, September 14, 1928, ibid.

⁵Robinson to B. M. Baruch, September 8, 1928, ibid.

Alabama and F. M. Simmons of North Carolina, state leaders, and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan increased his anxiety. He saw the state organizations languish from a lack of leadership and funds. Raskob's announcement of a \$4,000,000 national campaign fund had lulled the South into absolute dependence on unlimited funds from national headquarters. These funds had not been made available. Robinson believed that the need of a southern headquarters was strengthened and confirmed by his tour, for no close contact existed between national headquarters and state organizations.⁶ This apathy in setting up political machinery in each state reflected the fact that the South had not been an election problem for the Democrats since Reconstruction days.

The vice-presidential nominee encouraged the political leaders of every level in each state. In Tennessee he met with Senators Lawrence D. Tyson and Kenneth D. McKellar and Representative Joseph Byrns of the Nashville district; in Virginia he conferred with Senators Claude Swanson and Carter Glass and Governor Harry Byrd; and in North Carolina he spoke to Governor Angus McLean, Democratic State Chairman O. L. Mull, ex-Governor Cam Morrison, and ex-Secretary of the Navy and editor Josephus Daniels on the means of combatting the anti-Smith crowd, who, Robinson believed, controlled nearly all the wealth of the state.⁷ He spent a few minutes in

⁶Ibid.

⁷Robinson to Raskob, September 11, 1928, ibid.

Spartanburg, South Carolina, with the Honorable James F. Byrnes, and in Florida with Senator Duncan U. Fletcher. Senators William J. Harris and Walter F. George, his personal supporters in Georgia, differed on the starting time of the campaign in their state because of the anti-Smith opposition.⁸

Robinson kept national headquarters informed on the political developments in the South by letter, telegram, and conference. He suggested to Raskob that he invite certain state leaders to confer with him.⁹ He held a train conference with Pat Harrison and Jouett Shouse from Atlanta to Bowling Green.¹⁰ He pointed out to Harrison the need of a reasonable amount of money to make the organizations effective in the South and asked him to impress upon Raskob and the Executive Committee the importance of "acting promptly."¹¹ The Arkansan further stated that the Campaign Text Book should have been out much earlier so that it could have been placed in the hands of speakers. To release this material after the middle of September would do little good, for the speakers by that time would have supplied themselves, but with great difficulty. He emphasized that he had not received any helpful literature from national headquarters,

⁸W. J. Harris to Robinson, July 30, 1928, ibid.

⁹Robinson to Raskob, September 11, 1928, ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., telegram, September 14, 1928.

¹¹Robinson to Harrison, September 14, 1928, ibid.

nor a single message from the clipping service since the start of the campaign.¹²

However, in Little Rock on September 22, Robinson announced that prospects in the South had greatly improved and that these states would give the Democratic ticket a larger majority than was usually recorded in national elections. He held that the religious question was foremost; for regardless of the question that he had chosen to discuss, the local Democratic leaders would often urge him to devote a part of his address to the important issue of Smith and the Catholic Church.¹³

After four days of rest and a change of wardrobe, the Senator started his Western tour and remained in the field campaigning until November 5. Leaving Little Rock on September 27, the veteran campaigner made three scheduled addresses in Missouri; at Springfield in the southern Ozarks, at the University center in Columbia, and at Kansas City, the Republican convention site. He invaded the Republican stronghold of Kansas by making a farm address at the wheat-belt city of Wichita. His stops in Oklahoma were well-attended at Tulsa, Muskogee, and Chickasha; at Claremore, a mistake on the part of the national headquarters resulted in the smallest audience

¹²Robinson to Raskob, September 11, 1928, ibid.

¹³Press release, September 23, 1928, Robinson Papers; Memphis Commercial Appeal, September 23, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

of his entire tour. At Amarillo, Texas, he pointed to prohibitionists Josephus Daniels, Morris Sheppard, and Dan Moody, who were supporting the ticket. At Clovis, Robinson spoke before the largest political audience yet assembled in New Mexico. Clinton P. Anderson later Secretary of Agriculture under President Harry Truman presided. On October 6, he spoke at Roswell, and on the 8th at Phoenix, Arizona.

The Democratic nominee entered the home state of Herbert Hoover on October 9, making two extemporaneous speeches at Sawtelle and Venice Beach, and speaking that night at Los Angeles' Philharmonic Auditorium. At San Francisco Robinson pledged his support to the construction of the Golden Gate Bridge, and at Reno he repeated his Boulder Dam position and also endorsed the re-election of Senator Pittman. Throughout the day of October 12, he made platform speeches in the grape belt of northern California openly supporting Smith's position on the prohibition issue. He spoke in Seattle on the merchant marine and in Salem and Portland, Oregon, on the development of water power. There he paid tribute to Senator Norris for his work in public power development. He followed the local committee's request in Boise, Idaho, by making a strong attack on Senator Borah; he spoke to the Mormon people of Ogden on religious freedom; and he crossed the continental divide to speak to the wool and sugar beet growers at Cheyenne on Democratic tariff policies. Beginning at Hastings,

Nebraska, October 20, he delivered seven major addresses on agricultural relief to the following cities in the heart of the farm belt: Sioux City, Iowa, on October 23; Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on October 24; Fargo, North Dakota, on October 25; Duluth, Minnesota, on October 26; and Des Moines, Iowa, on October 27.

The Democrats felt that they had a fighting chance for Illinois and scheduled Robinson for four speeches: Peoria and Springfield on October 29, and Decatur and East St. Louis on October 30.

In the closing days of the campaign, Robinson made three speeches in Indiana at Evansville, Logansport, and Fort Wayne; delivered two addresses at Lima and Dayton, Ohio, on November 2; and spoke at Clarksburg, West Virginia, on November 3. Here he predicted a Democratic margin in the farm belt but admitted that the peculiar campaign had made it difficult to gauge the reaction of the people.¹⁴

Robinson arrived in Little Rock on Monday morning, November 5, and was met at the Union Station by Governor Parnell and five ex-governors. That night he received the greatest ovation ever given anyone in the history of the city as he spoke before thousands upon the state capitol grounds and reached other thousands over a southern network of 23

¹⁴Address, Clarksburg, West Virginia, November 3, 1928, Robinson Papers.

radio stations. In this closing address he reviewed the issues that he had presented so many times and concluded with a note of triumph for the party in his characteristic style:

We must not imprison human thought. We must not build dungeons of despair for Hope which carries the torch that illumines the pathway of the human race. Let Faith build an altar where it can. Let all men worship as they will. Penalize no man for frankness, honesty, and courage. Premiumize these attributes, for without them happiness will be supplanted by fear, and terror and dread will rule the world.

The good ship DEMOCRACY, flying the Stars and Stripes, with every sail full-spread, sails majestically into the lightning and the storm. Discharge all mutineers! Summon every loyal seaman to his post; bring into action every gun, as she thunders her way to triumph!¹⁵

Robinson's campaign tour has been recorded as a series of places and events. Three questions arise: What did he tell his audiences? What was he trying to achieve? What stand did he take on the various issues at stake as he spoke to thousands in the thirty-one states?

The number of times each topic was discussed, shown in parentheses in the following list, may be an approximate indication of the importance Robinson attached to each: agricultural relief (10); malfeasance of Republican administrations (7); personality, administrative record, and religious and temperance views of Smith (3); false prosperity and the Republican party (6); religious tolerance (4); Boulder Dam

¹⁵ibid. Address, Little Rock, Arkansas, November 5, 1928,

and water power development (3); immigration (3); labor (2); prohibition (2) veterans' bonus and medical care (2); Borah and the national campaign (2). He spoke only once on the following issues: international relations, tariff, federal budget, public schools, flood control, racial problems, women's legislation, the merchant marine, and an appeal for the support of the Progressives. When these topics were not major elements of the speeches, they were discussed frequently: religious tolerance (18); Governor Smith (27); Herbert Hoover (17); agricultural relief (16); Republican malfeasance in national administration (11); tariff (8); and public schools (9).

The Senator recognized that the economic restoration of agriculture to a position of parity with industry was a most important issue in the 1928 campaign. The farm problem was the major topic in three of his addresses in the South and seven in the Mid-west. He scarcely mentioned this problem in the Southwest, Far West, and East North Central states. Robinson understood the difficulties of the farm problem. He had, himself, engaged in farming for several years; he represented an agrarian state; and he had consistently advocated the passage of some kind of farm legislation. He presented no clear-cut program throughout the campaign.

Robinson was more forceful in attacking the Republican position on the farm question than in presenting the

Democratic agricultural program. His sharpest remarks against Hoover were over the farm issue. In his opinion, the agricultural depression had originated in the food-control policy which Hoover adopted as Food Administrator during Wilson's administration. To support this charge, Robinson quoted from Hoover's famous cablegram (April, 1919) to George N. Peek to show that Hoover opposed a price increase to the American wheat farmer and favored the retention of price control in the postwar period because of an immediate shortage of wheat. Hoover had consistently supported the low price theory, and his cure for the surplus was prices low enough to limit production to national consumption. Robinson concluded, "Boiled down to its last dry bones, the real relief for the farmer is higher prices with Smith, or low prices with Hoover!"¹⁶

The Arkansan had little faith in Hoover's plan for an agricultural conference or in Senator Curtis' plan for the creation of a joint Congressional commission to draft an agricultural relief bill. These plans seemed to be a repetition of the promises made in 1920 and 1924. Robinson named Hoover as the principal cause of the failure of the Republican party to pass an agricultural program. He held that Hoover and Curtis were responsible for the defeat of the McNary-Haugen Bill, the only important measure brought

¹⁶ Supplement to the Little Rock Address, November 5, 1928, ibid.

forward by the Republicans in seven years and it was vetoed twice by President Coolidge on the advice of Mr. Hoover. Robinson believed that the same interests that prevented the passage of the agricultural relief measures would dominate Mr. Hoover's policies.¹⁷

Hoover's New York address of October 22 particularly drew Robinson's criticism. He charged that Hoover showed a total failure to comprehend the nature and causes of the farm problem when he characterized as "State Socialism" the proposal to protect agriculture by an effective tariff. Hoover's assertion that America was nearer in 1928 to the ideal of the abolition of poverty and fear from the lives of men and women than ever before in any land revealed, to Robinson, a fearful lack of understanding of the farm problem and brought forth this caustic retort:

Can it be that Mr. Hoover is so completely out of touch with the true conditions that prevail in the homes of millions of our people engaged in agriculture that he does not realize their present situation? To the millions of farmers who work twelve hours a day in efforts to stave off the foreclosure of their homes under mortgages; to the millions of farm housewives in the United States who are constantly exhausted by drudgery; to those who have been compelled to give up the struggle of life on the farms and join the unemployed in industrial centers, this New York speech by Mr. Hoover must prove discouraging to the point of approaching despair.¹⁸

¹⁷Address, Charlotte, September 12; Sioux Falls, October 24; Fargo, October 25; Des Moines, October 27, Robinson Papers; The Sioux City Journal, October 24, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁸Address, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, October 24, 1928, Robinson Papers.

Throughout the mid-west, Robinson analyzed the factors that contributed to the economic maladjustment of agriculture. He declared that the farmer was plagued with high costs of production, and that the cost of farm machinery, equipment, and supplies had almost doubled after the war. Farm taxes increased from \$344,000,000 in 1914 to \$870,000,000 in 1927. In the period from 1920-28, two million farmers were driven from their homes by foreclosures while farm property values dropped by twenty-five billions and farm debts rose by more than ten billions of dollars. The indebtedness was appalling to Robinson in view of the very meager profits realized from farm production during recent years. Relatively high freight rates restricted the domestic markets and rendered many of them inaccessible to growers. The problem of the farmer centered around the disposition of the surplus crops above the requirements of the national market. Farm producers looked to the federal government for effective aid in keeping farm prices up and in disposing of the surplus abroad.

In his agricultural speeches, Robinson usually discussed the Democratic program for farm relief which differed little from the Hoover plan. His Fargo address outlined six principles. Hoover's proposal to restrict farm production to the national market he labeled impracticable and destructive to the agriculture industry. He pledged the party to

secure the advice and assistance of farmers and their legislative representatives in the preparation of agricultural legislation. To aid the farmer, he advocated expansion of the credit facilities of the Federal and Joint-Stock Land Banks. He believed the assistance of the federal government was necessary to encourage the co-operation and organization of the farmers and thereby overcome their difficulties. He supported the creation of a Federal Farm Board to co-ordinate the efforts of co-operative associations and to assist in the marketing of agricultural products. The Senator suggested that the key to the farm problem lay in the orderly disposition of surplus agricultural products by spreading its consumption over the marketing season. The solution which he advocated lay in the McNary-Haugen bill of 1928 which he voted for in 1927 and openly accepted during the 1928 campaign.¹⁹

Robinson believed that the federal government did not have the authority to restrict farm acreage by law, and that such a policy could not control production because of such variables as drouth, flood, storm, pest, and intensive cultivation. Hoover's plan of producing for the home market would prove ineffective, and such limitation would adversely affect our foreign trade.

Trying to raise prices by increasing tariffs on

¹⁹ibid. Address, Fargo, North Dakota, October 25, 1928,

surplus agricultural products that must be sold abroad appeared futile to Robinson. His solution was to reduce the high tariff rates on manufactured goods to prevent monopolies, arbitrary price control, and extortion. A system of cooperative marketing with government support was needed to protect the farmer against market manipulations and fluctuations. He explained that the platform did not expressly sanction the equalization fee but did sanction the right of farm producers to distribute the cost of marketing the surplus over the total marketable units. The principle of government subsidy was expressly repudiated by him.

Robinson was most effective in presenting the farm issue in the midwest. The tone of his remarks became clearer as his campaign swept through the grain belt. His attack became more effective, his words more descriptive, and his personality, more powerful. He sensed a political revolution in the making when such party leaders as George W. Norris were bolting the Republican ticket. Wide banners and complimentary editorials by corn-belt publishers reflected a favorable impression. The Senator knew that he would have to overcome the negative effects of Smith's announcement that the equalization fee plan would not be acceptable. Later, Smith aided by conditionally supporting the McNary-Haugen

²⁰ Robinson to Lewis G. Stephenson, July 17, 1928, ibid.

Bill' in his Omaha and St. Paul addresses of mid-September. The Arkansan telegraphed Smith from a wayside station in Iowa, suggesting that he announce that he would call an extra session of Congress in March, 1929, to consider the farm question. Robinson felt such an announcement would make a "ten strike" in the mid-western farming centers.²¹

His campaign in the farm belt became a major factor in effecting Republican strategy, for his "sledge hammer" blows against Hoover's stand on the farm question were having their effect. On October 26, Hoover and Borah met in Washington, D. C., and discussed plans to offset the effect of Senator Norris' defection and Robinson's successful campaigning.²² Two statements came forth from this conference. Borah announced a three-fold plan of agricultural relief. "The plan included a tariff bill with increased duties for farm products, a measure establishing a 'more satisfactory' farm marketing system, and the creation of a Federal Farm Board with a revolving fund to assist the farmer in marketing his surplus crops."²³ Hoover announced that he would

²¹Address, "Revival of Agriculture," Pine Bluff, Arkansas, July 18, 1936, ibid.

²²Alfred Lief, Democracy's Norris (New York, 1939), 317-325; Richard L. Neuberger and Stephen B. Kahn, Integrity: The Life of George W. Norris (New York, 1937), 169-79; Gilbert C. Fite, Peter Norbeck: Prairie Statesman (Columbia, Mo., 1948), 131, 135.

²³St. Paul Pioneer Press, October 27, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

call a special session of Congress in March, 1929, to deal with the farm issue if the December session did not solve the farm problem.²⁴ Thus, Smith's failure to recognize the significance of the farm issue permitted the Republicans to steal a march in their campaign strategy and bolster their sagging popularity in the farm belt.

Robinson's position on the farm issue appeared to be weakened by this development. The following week in Lima, Ohio, he gave his interpretation of the event:

The proposal of Mr. Hoover to call an extra session of Congress to consider farm relief is in the nature of a death-bed repentance. He realizes that the day of judgment is near, and in an effort to avert the penalty of infidelity to the Republican platform pledges of 1920 and 1924 promises an extra session. What the farmers need is a President who will sign, and not veto, their bill.²⁵

Robinson never stated Smith's stand on the farm issue. Smith shifted from a flat rejection of the equalization fee on August 3 to a conditional acceptance of it and the McNary-Haugen Bill on September 18. The New York Evening Post stated that he had made his attitude "clear as mud," and that his pose was nothing more than a "comfortable straddle." The New York Tribune commented that Robinson and Raskob had already gone over to the Populist camp, and Smith

²⁴Des Moines Tribune-Capital, October 27, 1928, ibid.

²⁵Address, Lima, Ohio, November 2, 1928, Robinson Papers.

was sticking his head "into the tent for a few kind words."²⁶

Other controversial issues relating to Smith centered about his religion, his relationship with Tammany, and his stand on prohibition. However, the Minority Leader gave eight addresses specifically commending Smith.²⁷ At Springfield and Columbia, Missouri, he discussed Smith's views on such current issues as legislation for women and support of public schools. In Dixie, the Senator struck back defensively at the personal opposition to Smith, but in other sections Robinson made a positive approach with less animosity.

The misrepresentations respecting Smith's ability and fitness to serve as president came in for vigorous denial in the South. Robinson identified Smith as the leader of the masses and the champion of the plain people, and praised him for his human touch. He characterized the governor as frank, courageous, sympathetic, and clear-minded. He compared him with all the great leaders of the Democratic Party:

Not since the days of Andrew Jackson has there appeared in the political arena a greater leader than the Democratic nominee. . . . He has demonstrated the same fighting qualities that made 'Old Hickory' beloved among his followers and feared by his partisan foes. . . . It is doubtful if a more magnetic man ever led the Democratic Party in all its history.²⁸

²⁶St. Louis Post-Dispatch, September 21, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

²⁷Cisco, Nashville, Knoxville, Columbia (South Carolina), Springfield (Missouri), Owensboro, Casper, and Fort Wayne.

²⁸Address, Nashville, Tennessee, September 6, 1928, Robinson Papers.

Smith's record as governor of New York also came in for commendation. Robinson pictured the governorship analogous to the presidency and asserted that Smith's four terms as governor had given him training far superior to that of any nominee presented by either party during recent years. Smith's experience, he believed, was broader than that enjoyed by the "immortal" Woodrow Wilson when first called to the Presidency and was much more comprehensive than that of either Harding or Coolidge. The vice-presidential candidate proclaimed him "the most independent and progressive Governor" of his generation, and stated that thousands of Republicans had split their tickets to support him each time he was elected governor. Not one of Smith's appointments, according to Robinson, was ever rejected by the New York State Senate, which was usually Republican; no public investigation ever charged Smith with a betrayal of public trust.

The Governor's many accomplishments in the way of reform were cited by Robinson, including reforms in public welfare, support and improvement of the public school system, prison reform, safeguards for public health, co-operative marketing for farm products, elimination of politics from the state highway department, defense of equal rights for women, protection of women and children from unsanitary and unsafe conditions of work in factories, conservation of the state's natural resources, reduction of taxes, abolition of

needless state offices, and close supervision of state charitable institutions and the operation of subordinate state offices.²⁹

In answer to those critics who charged that Smith would be a Catholic president, Robinson answered that Smith had proven himself an American governor, not a Catholic governor. He would not submit his office to the domination of any clique or group. When applied to government, his religious creed was as soundly American as any Methodist or Baptist ever professed. Protestants had been appointed to positions in his state cabinet and in state offices. Smith's private secretary was a Mason, a Protestant, and a Republican. Freedom of religion, the separation of state and church, the American public school system, and "the common brotherhood of man under the common fatherhood of God" all were a part of Governor Smith's creed.³⁰

In Richmond, Robinson stated that the extraordinary and unjustified attacks against Smith were motivated by his membership in the Catholic Church, and not from his attitude on prohibition. Neither the Democratic party nor its platform had ever prescribed any church or creed. Members of all sects were welcomed into the party. Prominent Catholics, as

²⁹Address, Cisco, Texas, September 4, 1928, ibid.

³⁰Amarillo News, October 6, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

Supreme Court Justices Butler, Taney, and White served the nation without discrimination. At Ogden, he visualized the censure of Smith's Catholicism as an organized political effort to bring about a retrograde movement into the Dark Ages when the spirit of intolerance prevailed.

This attack upon the Catholic Church, Robinson viewed as more harmful than the corruption under the Harding administration, for it would undermine the foundations of liberty and equality, incite hatred among religious groups, and poison the fountain of progress. He also thought that this injection of religious prejudice and animosity into the campaign distracted the attention of the public from the pressing issues and covered demagogues and corruption with a smoke screen. Protestant ministers came in for strong criticism for participating in the campaign. Robinson rebuked them for preaching political sermons from the pulpit. He asserted frequently: "When a preacher stops preaching Christ and Him crucified, and starts preaching Al Smith and him crucified, I become impatient."³¹

The Democratic Senator developed an interesting technique of combatting anti-Smith propaganda which he labeled slanderous and malicious. His tone of reproach was similar to that of Smith. He repeatedly denounced those who engaged in whispering campaigns as scandal mongers and political

³¹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), September 29, 1928.

scavengers and called their tactics unethical and un-American. He declared that it was a fear of defeat that led the opposition to use such underhanded methods. He asked:

Why are they apparently willing to accept the advantages of a whispering campaign designed to asperse the character of the able and patriotic gentleman . . . /who was chosen/ on the first ballot at the Houston convention? There can be but one answer.

They fear defeat if the battle is conducted in the open. They, therefore, employ poisonous gas and engage snipe shooters. Such methods cannot prevail. The people of the United States are fair-minded and just. They will resent as un-American and subversive of all ends to which our citizenship aspire an organized effort to win a national election through prejudice and falsehood.³²

Robinson made few references to Tammany outside of the South, but mentioned the organization in speeches at Tulsa, Amarillo, and Los Angeles. He defended Tammany as the friend of the South who had opposed the Force Bill of 1890 and secured the prison release of Jefferson Davis. He often reminded the Southern people that now was the time to repay Tammany's acts of kindness by supporting its candidate for president.

The discussion of the prohibition issue by Robinson was really a defense of the South's controversial position. Since this topic had less appeal outside the South, it was not mentioned after the Amarillo speech of October 4. His Nashville and Muskogee addresses dealt primarily with this

³²Ibid., September 14, 1928. The whispering campaign remarks were headlined in newspapers in Dallas, Knoxville, Richmond, Columbia (South Carolina), and Los Angeles.

issue. His analysis showed that the position of the two parties were approximately the same on the question:

Neither of the two major parties has ever heretofore made or attempted to make the question of prohibition a partisan issue. Both have recognized it as involving social and moral rather than political questions. . . . Both Democrats and Republicans have been left at liberty to express any opinion they entertain on the subject as to whether prohibition is the best way of dealing with the liquor issue. . . . It becomes apparent from a consideration of the language of the platforms of the two parties that no material distinction can be made between the declarations respecting prohibition. Neither party declares for or against modification. Both parties promise honest efforts to enforce it.³³

Robinson's uniform support of all prohibition measures before Congress for the preceding twenty years was called to the attention of the voters. Senator Curtis was also a dry, in Robinson's opinion; but the statements of Hoover upon prohibition indicated an indefinite and vague position. Hoover had advocated 2.75 per cent beer during the war, and according to Robinson, there was no statement to show that he had changed his position since that time.

Smith's position on the liquor issue Robinson called frank, clear, and forceful. Further, Smith recognized the duty to enforce the law even though in his own opinion a change was desirable. At Chattanooga, Robinson quoted Smith's telegram to the Houston convention and defended his belief that a disregard of the prohibition laws was insidiously

³³Address, Muskogee, Oklahoma, October 3, 1928, Robinson Papers.

sapping respect for all laws.

The proposition advanced by Smith involved two changes: first, he would liberalize the definition of the maximum alcoholic content of a non-intoxicating beverage and leave it to each state to fix the amount within limits prescribed by Congress; and secondly, he would amend the Eighteenth Amendment to permit each state to regulate within its own limits the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. Both Robinson and Smith contended that such a change would not permit the return of saloons, but would insure protection of the dry states against interstate shipments of intoxicating beverages.³⁴

Robinson scored the Republican party for its failure to enforce prohibition. He quoted Assistant Attorney-General Mabel Willebrandt who remarked that the feeble efforts of the Republicans to enforce prohibition "were so crooked as to be a burning disgrace."³⁵ Robinson warned that Hoover would likely follow the lax policy of the preceding administrations and forecast that Smith would give a "more just and uniform enforcement of the prohibition laws."³⁶

³⁴Address, Chattanooga, Tennessee, September 7, 1928, ibid.

³⁵Kansas City Times, September 17, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

³⁶Address, Muskogee, Oklahoma, October 3, 1928, Robinson Papers.

The claims of the Republican party that it was responsible for good government, economy, prosperity, and sound business were challenged by Robinson. He emphasized his attacks on the Republican party's record in the closing days of his campaign at Lima, Dayton, Clarksburg, and Little Rock. For the past eight years, he said, that the government had been in the hands of mediocre men. At Kansas City, he stated that the Coolidge economy was one of expanding agencies and rising governmental expenditures which increased from \$3,506,000,000 in 1924 to \$4,628,045,035 in 1928.

In addresses at Jacksonville, Mayfield, Tulsa, Roswell, San Francisco, and Springfield (Illinois), Robinson referred to the Republican prosperity as a "myth." He gave his definition of prosperity as the distribution of the national wealth among all who contributed--farmers, laborers, and small merchants as well as large merchants, bankers, and captains of industry. The Senator condemned the system that left only the crumbs of prosperity to the millions, and cited the Republican Party as responsible for the maldistribution of the national wealth. He repeatedly stated that ninety-five per cent of the national wealth was owned by five per cent of the population. This unequal distribution emphasized the unfairness of the Republican system of special privileges which favored campaign contributors. This was the system of

Alexander Hamilton, not of Thomas Jefferson.³⁷

Senator Robinson described the economic distress in the agricultural, textile, mining, and oil industries. He pointed to the three million unemployed workers, the increased tax burdens of the farmers, and the gravitation of uprooted rural population toward urban centers. In Springfield, Illinois, he charged that the bank failures over the past four years were appalling. In 1919 only fifty state banks and four national banks failed. But in 1925 one hundred and three national banks and three hundred and sixty-one state banks failed with liabilities of \$175,000,000; and in 1926 about eight hundred state banks alone failed with liabilities of nearly \$275,000,000. In the corn and wheat belt, Robinson singled out the referee in bankruptcy as the most prosperous individual to be found.

Business men were assured by Robinson that Smith and the Democratic platform were friendly and that "Bryanism" was no longer a factor in the party. He asserted that a Democratic tariff would not harm legitimate business, but would be beneficial alike to farmer, consumer, and manufacturer. Reduced tariffs would prevent monopolies, such as the aluminum trust, which arose under the favorable atmosphere of a packed Tariff Commission.³⁸ Robinson identified Hoover

³⁷Address, San Francisco, California, October 10, 1928, ibid.

³⁸Address, Springfield, Illinois, October 28, 1929; address, Dayton, Ohio, November 2, 1928, ibid.

with those giant trusts that destroyed competition; he appealed to the progressives, regardless of party, to protect the small business man from the economic tyranny of powerful corporations and to save "millions of legitimate business enterprises" operating on limited funds and facing bankruptcy and ruin.³⁹

The stand which Robinson took on conservation and reclamation, and his support of federal power development strongly appealed to the Far West. Nevada and southern California particularly favored his open support of federal construction and ownership of Boulder Dam. At Los Angeles, Reno, Portland, Sioux Falls, and Duluth, he showed that Smith held a similar view.⁴⁰ At the same time Robinson noted that Hoover repeatedly changed his mind on public or private ownership and operation of water power sites. Hoover's Los Angeles statement that he favored the construction of the highest dam possible in Boulder Canyon did not state a power policy. Robinson concluded that Hoover would follow the policy of Coolidge and release such water power sites as the power monopoly desired; he quoted Senator Norris, who condemned Hoover's opposition to the Muscle Shoals project as one of "glittering generality" which would not give to the

³⁹Address, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, October 24, 1928, ibid.

⁴⁰Smith's Denver speech on water-power policy is frequently quoted.

people "the benefit of cheap electricity."⁴¹

A Democratic victory meant to Robinson the "protection of the people against extortionate rates and unfair distribution" of electricity and the retention of public-owned power sites. A Republican victory meant the triumph of a power monopoly "which [had] expended millions in propaganda in an effort to obtain permanent control over one of the greatest necessities of modern life."⁴² These expressed views were not those of Robinson since he advocated private ownership and production of power.

Two of Robinson's addresses were devoted entirely to the veterans' problem which was generally mentioned throughout the campaign tour. The speech at Knoxville was eloquent, flowery, and sentimental; but the Phoenix address was direct, informative, and factual. Robinson had always been a staunch supporter of the Adjusted Compensation Act and other veterans' legislation. He justified his position on the basis that the soldier left a profitable job to perform military duty at low pay, and returned home jobless. Unemployment and lack of money worked a hardship upon him and his family.

Furthermore, business corporations were compensated for losses sustained by the government's prosecution of the war;

⁴¹Address, Portland, Oregon, October 15, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁴²Ibid.

measures equally liberal, he felt, should be adopted in behalf of the veterans, "whose courage and personal sacrifices preserved the nation in the greatest crisis ever known."⁴³

Governor Smith's success in securing appropriations of \$48,500,000 for New York veterans and \$4,500,000 for construction and equipment of a joint federal-state veterans hospital came in for praise from Robinson. He also commended Smith's support of veterans' preference for state civil service jobs, his aid in the passage of an act to create 450 educational scholarships, and his signing of a bill which exempted veterans' homes, organizations, and clubs from state taxation.

Robinson disapproved the vetoes of the bonus bill by Harding in 1922 and by Coolidge in 1924, and commended the Democratic Party for aiding in the passage of the bill over the President's veto. He condemned Harding's administration for placing the Veterans Bureau "under crooked politicians, who squandered \$125,000,000 of the funds appropriated for the care and comfort of the government's wards."⁴⁴ He said that Secretary Mellon opposed the bonus bill, but that Hoover had made no public statement on the measure.

In the western states Robinson set out to counteract Senator William E. Borah's influence in support of Hoover.

⁴³Address, Phoenix, Arizona, October 8, 1928, ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

Robinson attacked Borah's inconsistencies as a legislator and a campaigner, and pictured him as a man torn between high moral principles and low partisan conduct. Leslie Biffle, later Senate secretary, compiled the Borah material for Robinson's Clovis and Boise speeches. The tone of this attack paralleled that of Smith in his addresses.

Several times Robinson quoted from the Congressional Record to show that Borah in January, 1919, had attacked Hoover declaring that he had violated the principles of the Constitution, that he had permitted three food monopolies to fix prices during the war, that he was extravagant with the taxpayers' money, that he permitted the major meat packers to run the smaller packers out of business, and that he further requested an unlimited and undefined grant of power which could permit fortunes to be made again out of the taxpayers.

Other inconsistencies of Borah were shown. Robinson pointed out that in numerous speeches Borah had asserted that the real issue was prohibition, and that Smith's election would cause a breakdown of the Volstead Act; yet Borah had voted against its passage. On another occasion Borah had condemned the corrupt practices which prevailed in the nomination and election of Frank L. Smith (Illinois) and W. S. Vare (Pennsylvania); yet he had voted to retain them in the Senate. Borah had often spoken at great length in

behalf of honest government, but he had cast his vote against the resolutions advising the President to dismiss Daugherty and Denby from his cabinet. Robinson asserted that Borah had refused to run on the 1924 ticket because he disapproved the policies of Coolidge. But when Hoover pledged himself to continue Coolidge's policies, Borah with characteristic inconsistency became his chief advocate on the hustings.

This picturesque description of Borah as a devoted politician who supported his party's tactics was a feature of Robinson's Boise address:

Senator Borah and I are personal friends. We have been associated together for many years in the Senate, he on one side of the aisle and I on the other. For the greater part of the time he has been moved by exalted conceptions of public duty. When election time approaches, however, something comes over the Senator that it is difficult for those not close to him to understand. He puts aside the armor of righteousness and buckles on the garb of partisanship and goes forth a swashbuckling political partisan. The lone eagle abruptly ends his flight toward heavenly utopia and sweeps to perch himself on the filthy boughs with vultures.⁴⁵

Labor problems did not become an issue in the campaign of 1928. Robinson made two speeches on labor at Dallas and Peoria, and mentioned labor only three other times. Believing that his twenty-five years in Congress adequately indicated his support of labor, he made no attempt to defend his labor record. He stated his opposition to the use of injunctions in labor disputes, and proposed the adoption of

⁴⁵Address, Boise, Idaho, October 16, 1928, ibid.

a public works program to combat the effects of unemployment. He enumerated the many labor achievements of Governor Smith, picturing him as a leader of millions of plain people whose "simple faith counts more in the long run than the gratitude of the powerful purchased by favors at the expense of the weak."⁴⁶ Robinson never presented nor attacked the Republican position on the labor question. He simply characterized the party as uniformly subservient to great interests and indifferent to the masses.

The immigration issue was a minor one in the campaign, but Robinson felt it necessary to discuss this issue three times: Columbia (South Carolina), Hastings, and Evansville. Robinson stated that hired agents of the Republican Party were "whispering" that the Democratic Party, if elected, would reverse the policy of restricted immigration now in effect and open the gates to millions of foreigners of all sorts. Fundamentally, there was little difference, he said, in the party platforms or in the position of either candidate. Each would retain the National Origins Act; Smith preferred the use of the 1920 census figure instead of 1890 because he felt that quotas based on the 1890 figure would discriminate against southern and southeastern Europeans. Robinson emphasized that Smith did not favor unrestricted immi-

⁴⁶Address, Dallas, Texas, September 3, 1928, ibid.

gration nor the relaxation of the laws regulating it.⁴⁷

Interest in flood control of the Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, and Mississippi rivers was regional. Robinson devoted sections of his Mayfield, Tulsa, and East St. Louis speeches to this problem. He was a recognized leader on flood control legislation and supported a coordinated federal levee plan for the entire area to be constructed with federal funds. Since the Democratic party did not endorse flood control in its platform, Robinson usually upbraided Hoover for his shift of position on flood control legislation.

Robinson praised Hoover's leadership in relief work during and after the flood of 1927. At that time Hoover announced that he favored federal responsibility for the total cost and construction of the levees in the Mississippi valley. After a discussion of this matter with Coolidge in Washington, Hoover changed his position. He now insisted that one-third of the expense must be assumed by local interests. Hoover's change of attitude was a bitter disappointment to the people in the Mississippi flood plains who felt that he should have defended his original position.⁴⁸

Robinson discussed the Democratic policy on the

⁴⁷Address, Columbia, South Carolina, September 12, 1928; Hastings, Nebraska, October 20, 1928; Evansville, Indiana, October 31, 1928, ibid.

⁴⁸Address, East St. Louis, Illinois, October 30, 1928, ibid.

merchant marine in his Hot Springs and Seattle speeches. This policy assured an adequate merchant marine to meet the needs of the country. He attacked the Republican policy which permitted "the complete break-down of the United States as a shipping power." He praised Wilson for the restoration of the merchant marine. He condemned the action of the United States Shipping Board under Harding because it followed a reckless policy of scrapping much of the fleet "for the benefit of corporations competing with the United States Shipping Board." Thus Robinson concluded that a continuance of the Republican Party in office would reduce the importance of the merchant marine to a status of insignificance similar to that which it occupied before the Wilson administration. The Democrats planned to expand the merchant marine in order to supply additional support to the navy in case of war.⁴⁹

Tariff was the issue at Cheyenne, but it was often mentioned in relation to the equalization fee of the McNary-Haugen Bill. The contention of Republican leaders that the Democrats would enact a revised tariff which would lower the standard of wages and flood the markets with foreign manufactured goods, was denied; the Democrats would instead seek to increase the purchasing power of wages by reducing tariff rates and safeguarding the public against monopoly by preventing special tariff favors. They desired the restoration of

⁴⁹ibid. Address, Seattle, Washington, October 13, 1928,

the Tariff Commission to its position of an "impartial fact-finding tribunal." Robinson's stand is well stated in the following paragraph:

The Democratic proposal is designed to make effective such tariff rates as are necessary to give farm products equal advantages, in so far as possible, with manufactured commodities. No one can study the platform and reach any other conclusion. We desire to avoid building up or maintaining oppressive monopolies through the tariff or any other artificial process. We are committed to maintaining legitimate industry and high and just standards of wages. To accomplish this end, we believe it unnecessary to bring distress to any legitimate business.⁵⁰

International relations did not rate as a vital issue, but Robinson scheduled an address on this subject in Lincoln, Nebraska, to honor the late William Jennings Bryan who drew up the "cooling-off" treaties of Wilson's administration. Robinson said that "reactionary influences" controlled our foreign relations. He criticised the Republicans for encouraging a naval armament race by large appropriations and for creating ill-will and suspicion in South and Central America by using our troops in Nicaragua. He also believed that a question of our good faith and motives caused the failure of the Geneva Disarmament Conference and that the Washington Conference merely shifted the rivalry from battleships to cruisers and other craft and accomplished little toward permanent reduction of armaments.

Three policies, Robinson believed, would restore our

⁵⁰Address, Cheyenne, Wyoming, October 18, 1928, ibid.

popularity in the Western Hemisphere: first, keep out of the elections and other internal political affairs of Central and South America; secondly, discontinue any presidential executive agreement to provide external protection or internal supervision of a Latin American country; and thirdly, secure the cooperation of these countries in upholding the Monroe Doctrine as a hemispheric policy. His views closely paralleled the Democratic platform.

Robinson defended Smith's legislative and executive record in behalf of women and children in his Springfield (Missouri) speech and appealed to the women voters of the nation to support the Democratic ticket:

A desperate effort is being made to induce women voters to oppose the Democratic nominee for President on the theory that the Republican candidate, Mr. Herbert Hoover, has in many cases supported causes in which women are known to be concerned, and that Governor Smith has never been identified with measures in which women are particularly interested. The correctness of this conclusion is challenged. Quite the contrary is true. An examination of the record discloses that Governor Smith has taken the lead in securing legislative and administrative reforms for the benefit of women and children, and that his accomplishments in this behalf excel those of any other living statesman.⁵¹

At Columbia, Missouri, and in other speeches in the South and southwest, Robinson fully discussed the issue of Smith and the public school system. He pictured Smith as the defender of the public schools whose public acts proved

⁵¹ibid. Address, Springfield, Missouri, September 27, 1928,

him to be "the staunchest advocate and supporter" of the American school system of this generation. During his governorship, school appropriations increased over ninefold, and the average teacher salary doubled. Upon his recommendation in 1920, the legislature enacted a one and one-half mill levy on all taxable property and used the resulting \$20,000,000 fund to supplement teachers' salaries. He established a teachers' retirement fund and urged the consolidation of rural schools for better administration. Robinson assured the voters that Smith would use his moral influence to encourage the development of the public schools by the states.⁵²

In his midwest tour, Robinson appealed to the Progressive vote. He headed his news release from Sioux City, Iowa, with this banner: "Why Progressives Should Vote the Democratic Ticket." He labeled the Kansas City platform a product of ultra-conservatism which would continue the conservative policies prevailing in the Coolidge administration. He called Hoover and Curtis "reactionaries" who failed to speak out against the corrupting influences of Washington lobbyists. He counteracted Republican propaganda that he was unfriendly to the Negro race and defended his vote against the anti-lynching bill on the ground that it was unconstitutional. Robinson described his relations with Negroes as

⁵²ibid. Address, Columbia, Missouri, September 29, 1928,

"amicable and friendly," and continued, "I have never had a disagreement with any colored man."⁵³ He asked the Negroes to break away from the machine control of Pennsylvania Republican bosses.⁵⁴

In the closing days of the campaign at Evansville, Lima, and Dayton, Robinson pointed to the fallacies and fictions of the Republican campaign. At Dayton, he warned the voters to be on guard against the propaganda circulars that were flooding the mails, such as, "Vote for Hoover and keep your job." He asserted that a Democratic victory would not endanger business and industry nor deprive anyone of his job.⁵⁵

Robinson did not believe that Hoover's business experience qualified him for the job of President. Hoover had served as a mining engineering adviser in foreign lands and a supervisor of important relief work in the United States and Europe. The greater portion of his life had been spent abroad in organizing business corporations. As Secretary of Commerce the Democratic candidate thought Hoover had demonstrated no capacity for leadership in political affairs. He had remained "as silent as the Sphinx" when his fellow

⁵³Address, East St. Louis, Illinois, October 30, 1928, ibid.

⁵⁴Address, Sioux City, Iowa, October 23, 1928, ibid.

⁵⁵Address, Dayton, Ohio, November 2, 1928, ibid.

cabinet members were removed from office for dishonesty or incompetency. As chief agricultural adviser to Coolidge, Hoover had assisted in the defeat of farm relief legislation, and he had no definite substitute for the McNary-Haugen Bill which Coolidge vetoed upon his advice. In contrast Robinson felt that Smith's experience as an executive and as a legislator, combined with his personal magnetism and profound sympathy for the masses of the people, rendered him especially fitted for the great responsibilities of the presidency.

Along the lines sketched, Robinson vigorously presented the issues of the campaign. He had no ghost writer to assist him, and he had little time to prepare and dictate his speeches between speaking engagements. In fact, his time was so limited that he declined several local tours and receptions planned in his honor. His speeches came largely from his breadth of knowledge and his familiarity with the issues, many of which he had debated in the Senate.

Although he had misgivings about the results, he was willing to accept the verdict of the people. On election day he voted, visited Democratic state headquarters at Little Rock, and hunted that afternoon at nearby Lonoke. That night a few close friends called at the Robinson home to listen to the election returns, but they left early.

This election day of November 6 brought out a record number of citizens up to that time. By nightfall 36,805,450

people had cast a ballot, exceeding the 1924 total of 29,086,398 by some 7,600,000 votes. Even the 1932 results of the Roosevelt-Hoover campaign was only 3,000,000 ballots greater. Increases in Democratic strength were greatest in New England, Middle Atlantic, North Central, and Pacific areas. Outside of the South only Massachusetts and Rhode Island went Democratic, while even in the traditionally solid South, the states of Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Kentucky, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Texas went Republican. Although the Democrats had only 87 electoral votes, they polled a strong minority preference of 40.80 per cent.⁵⁶ As Baruch stated, a vote of nearly sixteen million was really something to be proud of.

In retrospect, the outstanding factor in the defeat of the Democratic ticket was probably the religious issue. It was a Protestant protest. The issue was ever present but often unexpressed. Many political leaders shared this view. Robinson wrote Pittman that "the religious issue made it impossible for the National ticket to win."⁵⁷ Senator Norris believed that "the greatest single element entering into the overwhelming victory of Mr. Hoover was religion."⁵⁸ William

⁵⁶Edgar E. Robinson, The Presidential Vote 1896-1932 (Palo Alto, California, 1934), 34.

⁵⁷Robinson to Pittman, November 21, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁵⁸Neuberger and Kahn, Integrity: the Life of George W. Norris, 178.

Allen White was impressed by the importance of this issue by the volume of his correspondence, the quantity of anti-Catholic pamphlets and his own campaign in the South.⁵⁹ George N. Peek, his co-workers, and the Smith Independent Organizations Committee worked hard to get the midwest agricultural vote, but they could not convince the farmers that the agricultural issue was paramount. Many rural people considered it "secondary to prohibition and religion."⁶⁰ Henry Ware Allen stated that practically every Protestant church became an anti-Smith headquarters and that "the American people either consciously or subconsciously had been possessed with fear that Governor Smith would turn the government over to Catholic control."⁶¹ A recent study of the 1928 national election in Oklahoma listed the religious issue as the most prominent cause of the Democratic defeat in that state.⁶² Hoover felt that the religious issue had no weight in the final result; as an example he cited New York where Smith had won four

⁵⁹Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York, 1947), 411.

⁶⁰Fite, George N. Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity, 218-19.

⁶¹Henry Ware Allen to Robinson, November 7, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁶²Elbert Watson, "The 1928 Presidential Campaign in Oklahoma" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Oklahoma, Norman, 1954), 115.

times for governor but lost for president.⁶³

A second major factor of importance in the defeat of the Democratic ticket was Smith's stand on prohibition. Traditionally dry South and rural America did not want a possible return of the saloon era. Senator Connally observed:

Smith's chief plank favored the repeal of prohibition. Unfortunately, he never realized how strongly the traditional Democratic principles attracted the average citizen. Nor did he realize the political strength of the dries. His provincial New York background convinced him that everyone wanted to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment and that no other issue was paramount.⁶⁴

Bishop James Cannon, Jr., Methodist Episcopal Church, South, stated that Smith and Raskob "by the ever-increasing emphasis of their attacks upon prohibition . . . fanned the flames of the revolution and aided in Smith's overwhelming defeat."⁶⁵ Hoover spoke in generalities and silently took advantage of the growing sentiment against Smith. Robinson saw the Democratic Party split over prohibition and straddled the issue for the sake of harmony.

The agricultural issue was a third important factor in the Democratic defeat. The farm vote could not be persuaded that its salvation lay in the success of the Democratic

⁶³Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933, 209. F. D. Roosevelt won the governorship of New York in 1928 by only a few thousand votes. His success was partially attributed to his extensive campaign in northern New York.

⁶⁴Tom Connally and Alfred Steinberg, My Name Is Tom Connally (New York, 1954), 132.

⁶⁵James Cannon, Jr., to Members of the Conference of Anti-Smith Democrats, February 5, 1929, Robinson Papers.

ticket. A majority of the Progressive vote that supported Bob LaFollette in 1924 voted Democratic in 1928, but still the Democrats could not overtake the normally Republican counties in the midwest. Of all national candidates, Robinson's position was nearest that of Peek and his agricultural program. "Smith's apparent disapproval of the equalization fee . . . materially hurt his chances in the midwest, because most farmers believed there was no difference between him and Hoover on agriculture."⁶⁶ Smith's indecisiveness muddled the issue and lost the farm vote. Hoover's support, late in the campaign, of a special session of Congress to relieve agriculture checked wavering Republicans.

Party organization and conduct of the campaign also influenced the results of the election. Democratic speakers did not match the Republican orators in effectiveness. Smith was considered a weak campaigner.⁶⁷ Robinson and Norris were the strongest speakers on the Democratic side. The Republicans, however, had William Allen White who hammered away on just one point--Smith's opposition to prohibition. Andrew Mellon effectively attacked the equalization fee proposal. Dr. Nicholas Murray Butler spoke on the prohibition issue. Senator Borah drew fresh inspiration from his fervid audiences

216. ⁶⁶Fite, George Peek and the Fight for Farm Parity,

132. ⁶⁷Connally and Steinberg, My Name Is Tom Connally,

as he praised Hoover lavishly, ridiculed Smith's farm position, and upheld the Republican Party as dry. Claudius Johnson felt that no man did more than Borah to make Hoover president.⁶⁸

The economic condition of the United States also contributed to the outcome. This has always been important in elections. The Democrats tagged the prosperous condition of the nation as a "myth," but the voters did not heed their plea. "The vast majority of those who supported Hoover were . . . motivated . . . by the argument that the country was prosperous and that the Republican Party was responsible for this happy state of affairs."⁶⁹ Hoover placed general prosperity first in his list of issues that defeated Smith. Smith also listed the prosperity issue first--followed by immigration, prohibition, and religion.⁷⁰ A national Catholic weekly called the prosperity argument "the most decisive factor" in winning the election.⁷¹

Many other causes were cited as aiding in the defeat of the Democratic ticket. Baruch thought it was due to the

⁶⁸Claudius O. Johnson, Borah of Idaho (New York, 1936), 408-31.

⁶⁹Roy V. Peel and Thomas C. Donnelly, The 1928 Campaign: An Analysis (New York, 1931), 47.

⁷⁰Smith, Up to Now, 408-13.

⁷¹Our Sunday Visitor (Huntington, Indiana), November 18, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

increased number of women voting for Hoover.⁷² Eighty-five per cent of the newspapers with a large circulation opposed Smith.⁷³ Such organizations as the Anti-Saloon League, Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Ku Klux Klan effectively opposed the Democratic ticket. The opposition of Protestant ministers and the bolting of such Democratic leaders as F. M. Simmons, Robert L. Owen, and Tom Heflin influenced votes in the South and midwest. And not the least important element was the inability of the Democratic campaign chest to match that of the Republicans.⁷⁴

Much sympathy was expressed over Robinson's valiant efforts in behalf of his party. Alfred P. Dennis of the United States Tariff Commission believed that Smith was too great a liability for the ticket. He wrote Robinson:

Unfortunately the leader of our ticket had three handicaps at the start, almost any one of which was enough to defeat him. First, he ran as a Democrat, in a country predominantly Republican. Second, as a wet, in a country politically dry. Third, as a Catholic, in a country overwhelmingly Protestant. It is a great pity that you could not have headed the ticket.⁷⁵

⁷²Baruch to Robinson, November 21, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁷³Our Sunday Visitor, November 11, 1928, Robinson Clippings.

⁷⁴Peel and Donnelly, The 1928 Campaign: An Analysis, 47. The Republicans collected \$10,062,115.27; the Democrats, \$7,220,681.52.

⁷⁵Alfred P. Dennis to Robinson, November 1, 1928, Robinson Papers.

Senator Robinson did not brood over the past. According to his wife's statement, Robinson realized that the chances for a Democratic victory in 1928 were slight, since millions of voters must cross party lines.⁷⁶ This ability to fight a losing campaign as if he expected to win and to devote his whole energies to a political contest with little hope of victory endeared him to his party. He played no martyr's role and felt no bitterness over the election results. "If the country does not want to be 'saved,'" he said, "I see no reason to worry about the matter."⁷⁷

Robinson's quick psychological response to surrounding political events conditioned him for continuous service as a leader in the party. He had the ability to reduce the passing political events to their proper perspective; to associate himself fully with the current movements; and to foresee the probabilities of political, social, and economic developments on a national scale. He indicated this in a letter to Baruch: "The 6th of November is a hundred years behind me, and I am looking about now to decide upon the best course for the future."⁷⁸

⁷⁶Interview, Mrs. Joe T. Robinson, Little Rock, August 15, 1952.

⁷⁷Robinson to Baruch, November 12, 1928, Robinson Papers.

⁷⁸Ibid.

The vigorous campaign methods pursued by the Democratic candidate gained the respect of his adversaries. His attack on the Republican Party and his defense of the Democratic Party had been conducted upon a high plane of statesmanship. National leaders recognized this accomplishment. Baruch telegraphed: "You have made an aggressive campaign that has added to your already distinguished career and made the admiration and love of your friends deeper and more abiding. I am prouder than ever of you as a statesman, a sportsman and a friend."⁷⁹ Governor Theodore Francis G. Green of Rhode Island wrote, "I . . . congratulate you on the magnificent campaign you personally conducted. You have the satisfaction of knowing you did everything you could have done in the best possible way."⁸⁰ Governor Albert C. Ritchie of Maryland commented, "On every side I heard what a wonderful campaign you made and everything I read about it impressed me the same way."⁸¹ Even ex-Senator Robert L. Owen, whom Robinson had criticized strongly for repudiating the national ticket, had a high regard for his campaign ability.⁸²

The courageous fight that the Arkansan put up increased his national stature. Many felt that he would be

⁷⁹Baruch to Robinson, November 5, 1928, ibid.

⁸⁰Green to Robinson, November 8, 1928, ibid.

⁸¹Ritchie to Robinson, December 9, 1928, ibid.

⁸²Robert L. Owen to Rees Pritchard Horrocks, November 13, 1928, ibid.

the party leader in 1932. Vice-President Dawes expressed this sentiment, "The result does not injure you but on the contrary makes you the undisputed leader of your party."⁸³

With the campaign behind him, the Senate Minority Leader prepared for the political battles ahead in the December session of Congress. After a five-day outing on the 33,000-acre ranch of ex-Congressman James W. Gardiner at Lake Charles, Louisiana, he expressed himself as "in the best of health" for the coming session. In the Senate he would support the Republican legislative program when he agreed; oppose it when he differed.

As for the party, Robinson intended to heal the breaches in the Democratic ranks before it was time to turn to the preliminaries of the 1932 campaign.⁸⁴

⁸³Charles E. Dawes to Robinson, November 7, 1928, ibid.

⁸⁴Robinson to Joseph O. C. O'Mahoney, December 10, 1928, ibid.

CHAPTER X

ROBINSON AND THE HOOVER ADMINISTRATION

The inauguration of Herbert Hoover on March 4, 1929, brought no break in the political pattern to which the country had become accustomed during the preceding eight years. The President's inaugural address was confined largely to general expressions of American ideals and aspirations. Since the major unfinished business of the Republicans was farm relief and tariff revision, Hoover carried out his campaign promises and called a special session of Congress on April 15, to deal with these issues.¹

Government aid to farm cooperatives was Hoover's answer to the widespread demands for agricultural relief and his ideas were incorporated in the Agricultural Marketing Act. However, there was a strong feeling by a substantial number of Democrats and Progressive Republicans that cooperative marketing was entirely inadequate to solve the main problems facing farmers. Thus a movement developed to add the export debenture principle to the Hoover plan. Robinson

¹Herbert Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933, 222.

was among those in the Senate who fought hard to get more positive aid for farmers by supporting the export debenture plan,² and he took an active part in the debate and discussion over this issue. He questioned Senator McNary's new stand on farm relief and his abandonment of the McNary-Haugen Bill. He also recalled that Senators McNary and Watson had previously urged the Senate to override Coolidge's veto of the measure, although they now asked the Senate to accept the Agricultural Marketing Bill with neither the equalization fee nor the debenture plan.

Robinson, however, was not in a very strong position to question the stand of others on the farm relief issue. Watson showed that in 1926 Robinson had actually opposed the equalization fee feature of the McNary-Haugen Bill and had not supported it until May, 1928. Robinson admitted that he had been slow to support this type of farm relief but justified his position because it was the only measure to survive the Republican legislative mill during the previous ten years. He thought the "economic adventure" was worth trying and added that no sooner had he accepted Watson's point of view than the latter changed his mind about the equalization fee. Watson replied, "The conversion of Paul on his way to Damascus was not more astounding than the conversion of the

²Robinson to George K. Lowe, May 24, 1930, Robinson Papers.

honorable Senator to the equalization fee."³ Retaliating, Senator Robinson called the switch on agricultural policy an admission of the eight-year failure of the Republican party's farm program.

The Republican Senators had attempted to eliminate consideration of the debenture plan by pretending that as a revenue measure it should originate in the House. Robinson protested:

Those who oppose the debenture plan, both in Congress and out of it, including newspaper writers who have expressed themselves upon the subject, have ignored the fact that there is little distinction in principle between high-protective tariffs levied for the benefit of the manufacturing interests and debentures issued to make agricultural tariff effective for the agricultural interests.⁴

Although Hoover had not actually changed his position on agricultural policy throughout the 1920's, Robinson charged that the President now shifted his position in order to bid for farm support by asking that farm production be limited to the American market in exchange for protective tariffs on imported agricultural products.

The Senate, however, passed the Agricultural Marketing Bill, including the debenture plan, on May 14, and was supported by most of the Democrats, Progressives, and mid-western Republicans. But the House rejected the bill and

³Cong. Rec., 61 Cong., 1 sess., May 1, 1929, p. 715.

⁴Ibid.

referred it to the joint conference committee. In order to make the measure conform to the demands of the House, the committee removed the debenture plan. The Senate's rejection of the conference report on June 11 again sent the measure back to the committee, which returned it to the Senate three days later still minus the debenture plan.

It had become the policy of the Democrats not to obstruct the passage of the farm bill, but Robinson placed in the record his party's opinion that though they would not vote against the measure they felt it would have been far stronger if the debenture plan had been retained. He labeled the bill as an "experiment" whose success and usefulness would depend entirely upon the character and ability of the men that the President chose as board members. He reluctantly supported the Agricultural Marketing Act because of the definite trend in the Senate in support of the measure and the possibility of incorporating the debenture plan in the tariff bill.⁵ The Senate accepted the conference report 74 to 8 on June 14, 1929, with Robinson and other Democrats supporting the measure.⁶

The tariff issue was the other unfinished business that the administration planned to consider at this special session. Robinson asserted the Republicans had not redeemed

⁵Ibid., June 14, 1929, p. 2872.

⁶Ibid., 2886.

their campaign pledges of 1924 and 1928 to restore the economic equality of agriculture with industry. He was convinced that tariff changes would be more beneficial to manufacturers than farmers. He pointed out that Senator Reed Smoot of Utah had for twenty years been a stumbling block to tariff reform.⁷ The Hawley-Smoot tariff measure faced even greater opposition than the Agricultural Marketing Act. The measure started out to serve the interests of the agricultural midwest; but after being reworked to give a general increase in several fields, it became one of the highest tariff measures in American history. Robinson considered the tariff partisan because the Democratic members of the House Ways and Means Committee had not participated in its planning and presentation. But Baruch advised Robinson that in the interest of harmony the Democrats should not hinder the program of President Hoover. He stated, "I doubt very much whether anything is going to result, but at least let the responsibility lie exactly where it should. Do not leave any grounds for it to be said that any Democrat has been trying to muddy the waters by interfering with the President."⁸ Robinson ignored Baruch's admonition however and expressed his unwillingness to accept carte blanche the administration's program of farm and

⁷Ibid., 2871.

⁸Baruch to Robinson, October 8, 1929; March 27, 1929, Robinson Papers.

tariff legislation. He foresaw the possibility that a tariff designed for farm benefit would fail in its purpose because special interests would demand a general revision upward.⁹

Industrial interests exerted pressure upon the President and Congress to broaden the application far beyond what President Hoover seemed to envision originally. The Washington News declared that the tariff bill was "almost everything President Hoover said it must not be."¹⁰ The Annalist published figures purporting to show that American farmers gained \$124,000,000 in increased prices under the tariff but paid out \$426,000,000 for direct increases on industrial goods--thus losing more than \$300,000,000.¹¹ Bernard Ostrolenk wrote that the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Bill had replaced the protective theory with the theory of embargo and that American industry, hiding behind this wall, might "with impunity make huge profits at the expense of the consumer."¹²

When the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Bill was introduced in the Senate, opposition to the bill formed behind the leadership of Pat Harrison, F. N. Simmons, Tom Connally, Arthur

⁹Seattle Times, April 14, 1929, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰Washington News, May 10, 1929, ibid.

¹¹The Annalist (New York), May 24, 1929, p. 931.

¹²Ibid., p. 932.

Capper of Kansas, George Norris, William E. Borah, and Robinson. Senator Burton K. Wheeler from the mining state of Montana attacked the "hypocrisy of the Hawley bill" as a protector of American labor because the eastern states had succeeded in having manganese placed on the free list.¹³ Robinson had participated in the fight to amend the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Bill by including the debenture plan. Although the Senate witnessed one of the bitterest fights ever staged,¹⁴ the amendment was defeated by two votes. Norris then presented another amendment which was practically the export debenture feature that Robinson endeavored to include in the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929. But since the two houses were diametrically opposed, it was impossible to pass any tariff measure at this lengthy special session.

The Washington News gave credit to the Democratic-Progressive bloc in the Senate for attempting to reduce the general tariff level on several items.¹⁵ The New York Herald Tribune criticized Robinson for cooperating with the insurgents to delay the passage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act:

¹³New York World, August 15, 1929, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁴Robinson to George K. Lowe, May 24, 1930, Robinson Papers.

¹⁵Washington News, October 15, 1929, Robinson Clippings.

If the Democratic leaders want to avoid responsibility for delaying or preventing tariff revision all they have to do is to dissolve the alliance with the insurgents. The latter have their eager eyes glued on their own political advantage and would sacrifice to it any possible advantage to their Democratic associates or to the farmer. Mr. Robinson has an uneasy suspicion that he has been pulling chestnuts out of the fire for the LaFolletteites. He must be at least dimly aware that if the tariff bill is beaten by the Senate coalition the Democratic party will find itself once more unable to dodge the role of popular scapegoat.¹⁶

Angered by these and similar comments, Robinson retorted:

. . . In no sense admitting my responsibility or the responsibility of those immediately associated with me in this Chamber, for the life or death of the measure, and distinctly repudiating the effort of some Senators to lay this bastard on our doorstep, I am entirely willing to go on as heretofore and facilitate the procedure in every way possible. . . . It has been our aim to turn the light on the bill, and to reflect the . . . real interests of the public. . . . There is not the slightest intention to depart from that purpose. It will be carried forward, and you will take your share of the responsibility for whatever happens to this poor infant.¹⁷

During the second session of the 71st Congress, the tariff measure underwent several changes as the House and Senate considered it. When the Senate voted to release their conferees on the export debenture plan, it was apparent that they had bowed to the will of the House. When the bill was reported again to the Senate on June 13, Robinson gave a clear analysis of the impending effects:

¹⁶New York Herald Tribune, September 16, 1929, ibid.

¹⁷Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., 1 sess., October 28, 1929, p. 4959.

. . . It will leave agriculture in a worse condition than at present. The benefits promised from the revision of agricultural rates are likely to be more than offset by the enhanced costs of manufactured commodities. Instead of restoring the equality of agriculture with other industries, the new law will be calculated to widen the discrimination against the farmer.

This bill is far more likely to prolong than to end the business depression from which our country is suffering.¹⁸

In a final appeal Robinson paraphrased a letter from John J. Raskob to the effect that the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act would inevitably cripple foreign trade and would generally be adverse to the commercial and agricultural structure.¹⁹ The Senate finally cleared the tariff act on June 13, 1930, by a vote of 44 to 42, and the measure was signed by President Hoover.

Although the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act had become law, Robinson was determined to renew his fight against the measure. A month later in a radio address Robinson asserted that the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act would not add one cent to the Farmer's price of grain nor aid in restoring America's prosperity.²⁰ A year later in an address before the Alabama

¹⁸Ibid., June 13, 1930, pp. 10622-23.

¹⁹Raskob to Robinson, June 12, 1930, Robinson Papers; Charles G. Ross, "Old Guard Needs Five Democratic Senators to Put over Tariff Bill," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, June 8, 1930, Robinson Clippings. The article is an analysis of the merits of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act.

²⁰Address, "The New Tariff Law and Agriculture," July 14, 1930, Robinson Papers.

Polytechnic Institute, the Senator reiterated that the measure was ineffective economically because of its limitation of export-import trade. He maintained that a tariff act which reduced domestic purchasing power and restricted foreign commerce would diminish consumption and increase unemployment.²¹

Robinson did not give up easily; he bargained with President Hoover on July 10, 1931, for a revision of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff in return for Democratic support in his European debt suspension plan. The Senator reasoned that a tariff revision would give relief to the American people just as the debt moratorium plan would aid in the relief of Europe.²² That summer political cartoons pictured Robinson wearing a wide-brim hat and boxing gloves and holding in one hand a beaten, limp form with patches and scars labeled "The Hawley-Smoot Tariff." Near-by stood John Q. Public mopping his dripping brow and saying, "Joe can't you lay off till this hot wave subsides?"²³ Robinson accepted the challenge of Senator Watson of Indiana to make the tariff an issue in the coming session.²⁴

²¹Address, "Perennial Problems," Alabama Polytechnic Institute, May 19, 1932, ibid.

²²Washington Star, July 10, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

²³Ibid., July 9, 1931.

²⁴Ibid., July 10, 1931.

As Robinson had predicted, the tariff and farm board measures failed to alleviate the condition of the farmer. In August, 1931, he wrote President Hoover that cotton prices were too low to pay even the costs of gathering and marketing the crop, so naturally this precluded any repayment of Joint Stock or Land Bank loans owed by cotton farmers. He requested that Hoover and Secretary Hyde consider his proposal that an extension be granted any farmer who had paid at least one-fourth of his loan and would give a first lien on the next crop.²⁵

By 1931 Robinson had come to support acreage reduction as a means of helping raise farm prices. He suggested that cotton acreage be reduced one-third to one-half and urged the President and Secretary Hyde to work out a program of voluntary acreage reduction. He advocated working out a voluntary contract with farmers to reduce acreage, but Secretary Hyde declared that the Agricultural Department could not legally take cognizance of such contracts. Various newspapers in the South supported Robinson's stand and agreed that the voluntary contractual agreement was legal in every way.²⁶

²⁵Robinson to President Hoover, August 31, 1931, Robinson Papers.

²⁶News and Times (El Dorado, Arkansas), September 10, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

That fall cotton planters held a conference at Jackson, Mississippi, and urged each state to pass a uniform measure recommending the voluntary limitation of cotton acreage. In December, Robinson again urged Secretary Hyde to continue relief to cotton farmers only if they promised to cut their 1932 acreage one-half below that of 1931. Under Robinson's plan, loans would be granted only to those farmers who conformed to suggested governmental restriction.

Robinson also suggested that the equalization fee be applied experimentally to wheat before it was tried on general agricultural products. He claimed that the federal government had no power to fix the price arbitrarily, nor did he feel that destroying crops already planted was justified in order to bring about a rise in commodity prices.²⁷

When the Federal Farm Board failed to stabilize the prices of basic crops, Robinson, Baruch, and Republican Senator David Reed advocated the Board's termination.²⁸ Robinson supported Senator Norris' amendment to investigate the board and either reform or abolish it. Business men generally opposed the board too. Midwest newspapers joined in the attack by publishing a statement that a price decline

²⁷ Robinson to S. Heinemann, June 11, 1932, Robinson Papers.

²⁸ Baruch to Robinson, telegram, May 12, 1932, *ibid.*; Bureau of Publicity, Democratic National Committee, Washington, D. C., 1931.

followed each move to stabilize prices.²⁹

While Congress wrestled with farm relief and tariff legislation, problems of foreign policy also confronted the nation. The Kellogg-Briand pact, a multilateral treaty to outlaw war as an instrument of national policy, had been presented to the Senate for ratification in January, 1929. Monsieur Briand hoped this agreement would bolster the security of France who was at odds with Great Britain and feared the implications of mutual support treaties negotiated by Germany and Italy with other European powers.

Robinson gave his support to the pact, although he agreed with Hiram Johnson that no country would observe such limitations if it felt justified in using armed force. He contended that the value of the treaty would be its psychological effect. "When parties enter into an agreement not to fight," he said, "they keep the engagement so long as they are in a good humor; but if sufficiently angered, they are likely to forget the engagement and resort to violence."³⁰ He argued that it would promote good will and produce a peaceful atmosphere for the settlement of controversies.³¹

²⁹Dennison Bulletin (Iowa), n.d., Robinson Clippings. Cotton brokers echoed the sentiment that the board was "uneconomic and unsound." S. Y. West to Robinson, February 18, 1931, Robinson Papers.

³⁰Cong., Rec., 60 Cong., 2 sess., January 14, 1929, p. 1136.

³¹Ibid., 1651.

Vice-President Charles G. Dawes played an active part in securing the Senate ratification of the treaty, but gave credit for the overwhelming vote to the efforts of a half-dozen Senators--Democrats Robinson, Tom Walsh, and Claude Swanson, and Republicans William E. Borah, Charles Curtis, and Arthur Vandenberg.³²

However, rumblings of unrest in Europe continued to be heard during the early months of Hoover's administration. The President said he believed that one of the surest ways to have world peace was to eliminate frictions which arose from competitive armament.³³ Early in October, 1929, after the visit of Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald to the United States, President Hoover appointed a delegation to attend the Naval Conference in London. Robinson was a member of the group which included Henry L. Stimson, Secretary of State; Charles Francis Adams, Secretary of Navy; Charles G. Dawes, ambassador to Great Britain; Dwight W. Morrow, ambassador to Mexico; Hugh A. Gibson, ambassador to Belgium; and Senator

³²Bascom N. Timmons, Portrait of An American: Charles G. Dawes (New York, 1953), 263. The genuine friendship existing between Dawes and Robinson can be traced through the correspondence and the comments of others. At the last session of the Senate over which Dawes presided, in behalf of the Senate members, Robinson with Senator Moses presented a silver tray to the retiring Vice President at which time the Arkansan praised him for his fairness, promptness, generosity of disposition, and decisiveness. Dawes, Notes as Vice-President 1928-1929, 308-09.

³³Hoover, The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and the Presidency, 1920-1933, 344.

David A. Reed of Pennsylvania.

Hoover chose Robinson as a delegate because he debated well and was skillful in give and take situations. He was described by his colleagues as a "Franklinesque figure in modern diplomacy."³⁴ The Senator was also a member of the Foreign Relations Committee and had made successful tours as ambassador of good will in many foreign countries. Profiting by Wilson's mistakes, President Hoover wanted to give recognition to the leader of the opposition party in the Senate and thus gain the Democratic party's support which was essential in order to ratify a treaty.

The appointment surprised Robinson and forced him to readjust his plans.³⁵ He wrote Charles G. Dawes: "I do hope we can help work out an arrangement that the country will approve and that will be helpful in reducing the burden of armament."³⁶

Senator and Mrs. Robinson sailed for London, January 9, 1930, and were comfortably quartered in the Ritz Hotel. King George V officially opened the conference on January 21, 1930, with a plea to the nations to remove a feeling of insecurity throughout the world and to reduce further the heavy

³⁴Edwin A. Halsey to Robinson, August 7, 1931, Robinson Papers.

³⁵Robinson to J. W. House, October 22, 1929, ibid.

³⁶Robinson to Charles G. Dawes, November 16, 1929, ibid.

burden of armaments by extending control to other categories of vessels.³⁷

Prime Minister MacDonald, chairman of the conference, outlined the problems that must be solved in order to prevent a disastrous armament race. As a gesture toward world peace, he announced on January 27 the recent cancellation of construction upon two cruisers. The other nations were not so obliging. Italy sought parity with France, and France sought an overall limitation of tonnage rather than specific tonnage for each category of vessels. Robinson and Secretary Adams insisted upon and secured approval of the principle that the first desideratum would be the acceptance of tonnage equality between the United States and Great Britain,³⁸ even though MacDonald was under strong pressure from the British Commonwealths to retain supremacy in some categories. Robinson was encouraged by the apparent willingness of the members to cooperate. He wrote Senator Claude Swanson, "Every suggestion which I have felt necessary and insisted upon has been accepted by the other delegates. This is true of publicity and the order of procedure relating to categories." He added, however, that he thought it was absurd for the United

³⁷Proceedings of the London Naval Conference of 1930 and Supplementary Documents, Publication No. 187, Department of State (Washington, D. C., 1931), 27. Hereafter cited as Proceedings of the London Naval Conference.

³⁸Washington Post, editorial, January 27, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

States to make further sacrifices in the battleship category which was best adapted to her use until limitations had been extended to all classes of naval craft.³⁹

Speaking in behalf of the American delegation at the Conference, Robinson insisted that a limitation be placed upon the tonnage of cruisers and destroyers. If the submarine could not be abolished, he urged its restricted use. He reminded the assembled delegations that abiding peace rested upon confidence and goodwill and that future meetings would be effective only if the proceedings of the London conference were guided by justice and wisdom.⁴⁰

The demands of the United States, Great Britain, and Japan seemed amenable to compromise, but France's fears concerning Italy's Mediterranean strength and Germany's "pocket" battleship made her tonnage demand so great that agreement appeared impossible. Prime Minister MacDonald, Secretary Stimson, Ambassador Morrow, and Senator Robinson met with Premier Tardieu of France at St. James' Palace in a fruitless attempt to slice something like 200,000 tons from her demands. Monsieur Tardieu was willing to reduce France's tonnage requirements if the powers present would sign a Mediterranean Locarno Pact. The United States refused.

³⁹Robinson to Claude Swanson, January 31, 1930, Robinson Papers.

⁴⁰Proceedings of the London Naval Conference, 261-64.

In an address before the Association of American Correspondents in London, February 19, 1930, Robinson stressed seven results that Americans expected from the London conference: a limitation of all classes of armament; an eventual reduction of the limitations placed on all categories; a numerical limitation on submarines, cruisers, and destroyers, and parity with Great Britain; a further limitation of the battleship category; diversion of inventive genius away from instruments of war and the bombing of cities; a continued reduction of naval armament; and an emphatic rejection of any treaty obligating the United States to guarantee the national security of any European nation.⁴¹

This frank statement of the United States' objectives received favorable publicity in American newspapers. The New York American headed its editorial page, "Robinson's London Speech Rejecting League Revives Democratic Party." The paper further commented that if Robinson's statement was a flat refusal to join in guarantees of security for any European nation, "it was the most important political utterance that had been made since the Democratic party went to its death under President Wilson." The editor believed that the party had a chance to revive itself under the "leadership that Senator Robinson now seemed to promise," and to escape from the burial ground of "internationalism into which Wilson

⁴¹Ibid., 268-70.

led the party eleven years ago." His interpretation of Robinson's position was that since he had shifted his stand from that of an ardent supporter of the League in 1918-19 to one of limited support, the Democrats could not oppose the League and form a coalition with the Progressives "who have consistently stood for Washington's policy of freedom from foreign entanglements."⁴² Robinson sensed America's reaction as one of isolationism and knew that any reduction of armaments linked with a mutual European security pact would not be acceptable to the United States Senate and the general public.

Senator Key Pittman of the Foreign Relations Committee supported Robinson's position at the Conference when he wrote, "Our citizens have clearly indicated to my mind that they are not ready to assume even the small responsibilities and liabilities attendant upon being a member of the League of Nations."⁴³ Senator Claude Swanson also observed, "I have seen several newspaper correspondents and they all agree that you are the outstanding member of the delegation. You seem to be the only one who has any positive policy."⁴⁴ Senator Elmer Thomas noted, "Next to Secretary Stimson you have received, by far, the most comment, and . . . the comment

⁴²New York American, March 1, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

⁴³Key Pittman to Robinson, March 3, 1930, Robinson Papers.

⁴⁴Claude Swanson to Robinson, March 6, 1930, ibid.

relative to your activities has all been unanimously approved by the press and by the people."⁴⁵

One of the most severe critics of the Conference was Senator Kenneth McKellar of Tennessee. He expressed the hope that Robinson and Reed would not be misled by "balderdash and claptrap."⁴⁶ Later, he became so irked by the demands of England, France, and Japan that he asked the Senate to recall the American delegation on the ground that the other conference powers did not intend to reduce armaments. Robinson answered McKellar's attack by writing that partisanship and politics had no place in the solution of international problems. He stated that his constant desire had been to cooperate as if he "were primarily responsible for the results."⁴⁷ He pointed out to McKellar that powerful influences such as national rivalries and jealousies were dangerous to an international conference.

Robinson favored full and complete news reporting, contrary to the policy set down by Stimson and MacDonald, because he deplored the inaccurate news reports that were reaching the American public.⁴⁸ He inquired of Senator Borah

⁴⁵Elmer Thomas to Robinson, March 13, 1930, ibid.

⁴⁶Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., 2 sess., January 28, 1930, p. 2585.

⁴⁷Robinson to Kenneth McKellar, March 30, 1930, Robinson Papers.

⁴⁸Ibid.

why so little emphasis had been placed in the American press on the Japanese armament program being advanced at the conference. Actually, Japan wanted parity in categories in which she equalled or excelled the United States, and favored limitation in other categories in which the United States had a superiority. He felt that mutual fear prevented political accord between France and Great Britain, and that France might even jeopardize the understanding between England and the United States. He thanked Borah for the support given in his radio address and complimented him for his ability to anticipate possible dangers that might result from a failure to reach an agreement. He commented further, "I believe my friend McKellar will regret more and more the plight which he put upon us by publicly demanding the recall of our delegation before our efforts had been completed or exhausted."⁴⁹

After a brief recess the Conference reopened. MacDonald felt enthusiastic about the results. Foreign Minister Briand was gloomy over the poor prospect of a security pact for France and over the parity demands of Italy. Senator Reed and Ambassador Matsudaira agreed on 70 per cent of parity for cruisers and between 75 and 80 on destroyers and submarines. However, irreconcilable factors still existed among England, France, and Italy. By March 22 the intense rivalry between Italy and France in the Mediterranean was openly

⁴⁹Robinson to William E. Borah, March 4, 1930, ibid.

recognized; and the naval entente between England and the United States was further cemented. France did not feel secure in the presence of Italy and Germany and wanted to assure her protection by asking the United States and Great Britain to join her in a consultative pact. This pact would not commit the United States to send military forces but would place a moral obligation upon this country.

By March 24, Robinson admitted the possibility of the failure of the conference to reach an agreement. But in spite of these problems, he wrote Elmer Thomas of his plans to secure an arms limitation treaty:

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind that the call for the conference should have been delayed until both Italy and France were better prepared for the settlement of their differences. The same is true between France and Great Britain. I am trying to formulate a plan . . . designed to bring in the French and to assure a Five Power Treaty. Even if we fail in the latter there exists a likelihood that an agreement may be entered into between Great Britain, Japan, and the United States. This was all we sought at Geneva in 1927.⁵⁰

When France learned that a consultative pact could not be secured with Great Britain and the United States, her delegates deadlocked the conference by returning to Paris. Later, Briand returned to London with the hope that such a pact could be worked out. An American committee composed of Robinson, Morrow, and Ambassador Hugh Gibson tried diligently to present an agreement acceptable to France and to the United

⁵⁰Robinson to Elmer Thomas, March 24, 1930, ibid.

States Senate. This proposed agreement included the humanization of submarine warfare and a security consultative pact for the European countries and the United States. The New York Times, the New York World, and the Boston Evening Transcript supported the proposed act.⁵¹ The Public Ledger, the New York Journal of Commerce, and the Hearst papers opposed it.⁵² The Hearst papers had previously supported the Robinson opposition to the consultative pact with France but now demanded that Robinson and the other American delegates come home. Hearst claimed that Robinson had accomplished everything possible by standing adamantly against entangling alliances, unlike the "hesitating, milk-and-water Stimson talk," which favored a consultative pact with foreign nations.⁵³ The consultative pact was rejected by the attending powers but the extended discussion of it forced the Conference to remain in session long enough for the Japanese delegates to receive approval from Tokyo and sign the three-power pact.

When the success or failure of the conference hung in the balance, Will Rogers who covered the Conference remarked: "If they can just get out of there before war is declared they will be fortunate. We can charge the whole

⁵¹New York Times, March 27; New York World, March 27; Boston Evening Transcript, March 26, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

⁵²Philadelphia Public Ledger, March 27; New York Journal of Commerce, March 26, 1930, ibid.

⁵³Newsclippings, ibid.

thing off as a business loss, but a social success. It will go down in history as a dressmaker's triumphal conference."⁵⁴

Senator Reed was generally accredited by his colleagues with solving American, British, and Japanese problems; and the delegates of these nations went into conference on April 8 to write a tri-partite agreement. Robinson supported an escalator clause which permitted increased tonnage in those categories which were being expanded by the nations not signees of the above agreement.⁵⁵

On April 20, Robinson addressed the United States by radio and presented the results of the London Naval Conference. The American delegation had achieved limitation of all classes of naval vessels, naval parity with Great Britain, and a general reduction of naval tonnage. The United States would not furnish security to any signatory power and could carry out the replacement of her over-aged craft in an orderly manner at a lower tonnage figure.⁵⁶

Frank H. Simonds, noted correspondent, summed up the accomplishments of the naval conference:

As a result of the naval treaty, Britain will almost completely, Japan measurably stand still, while the United States undertakes a very far-reaching program of new construction and replacement that will, without

⁵⁴Chicago Tribune, March 30, 1930, ibid.

⁵⁵Proceedings of the London Naval Conference, 284.

⁵⁶Ibid., 284-89.

changing the gross tonnage of the American fleet, make it three or four times more effective as a fighting machine than before. But no other consequence was to be looked for in any conference where parity and reduction were both to be had at London.⁵⁷

When the American delegation docked at New York, Governor Whalen officially welcomed it and accompanied the members as they paraded through the streets of New York City. On the following day Senator Robinson was escorted into the Senate amid enthusiastic greeting from his colleagues.

Prime Minister J. Ramsey MacDonald expressed his appreciation for such a capable delegation selected by President Hoover:

You sent over a splendid team who, severally and collectively contributed very much indeed to what success the Conference had. It is not easy for me to convey to you how much good they really did. They were far more than delegates to a conference, doing the work of a conference; they were ambassadors from one people to another; and the personal loss which we felt when they left was very keen.⁵⁸

Many Americans praised Robinson's efforts, including Charles G. Dawes, Senator Thomas J. Walsh, Herbert Bayard Swope, and Owen D. Young who wrote, "From all of the reports which came to me, you made a great place for yourself, not only with the members of the other delegations with whom you came in contact, but on every appearance in the City of

⁵⁷Frank H. Simonds, "Parity Demand of U. S. Shaped Parley Result," Washington Evening Star, April 20, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

⁵⁸J. Ramsey MacDonald to Herbert Hoover, May 1, 1930, copy to Robinson, Robinson Papers.

London. In addition to this, you apparently not only maintained but increased the great respect in which your associates held you."⁵⁹

Senator Robinson immediately scheduled several addresses to inform the American people about the London Conference before the treaty was considered for ratification by the Senate. He felt that the average citizen had been misled by the press and the opposition.⁶⁰

Senator McKellar, in a speech over the NBC radio network, attacked the London agreement as a surrender of American rights. He did however pay tribute to Robinson and Reed:

If it were not for the fact that Senator Reed of Pennsylvania and Senator Robinson of Arkansas helped to negotiate this treaty there would not be a corporal guard in the Senate in favor of it. . . . Senator Reed . . . is one of the ablest and strongest men on the Republican side and Senator Robinson is one of the ablest and strongest men on the Democratic side. There are no finer men, and but for their strong and engaging personalities the proposed treaty would be overwhelmingly rejected. . . . I believe if it is signed it will be to the great injury of the United States.⁶¹

Congress adjourned with the treaty still pending before the Senate. President Hoover called an Extraordinary Session of the Senate on July 7 to consider the treaty and

⁵⁹Owen D. Young to Robinson, May 7, 1930, ibid.

⁶⁰Address on the London Naval Conference, Arkansas Bar Association, Fort Smith, June 5, 1930, ibid.; Proceedings at the Unveiling and Dedication of the Peace Monument, Montreal, Canada, June 12, 1930, p. 23, ibid.

⁶¹Kenneth McKellar, Address on the London Naval Treaty, June 25, 1930, ibid.

urged its ratification: "This treaty does mark an important step in disarmament and in world peace. . . . If we fail now, the world will be again plunged backward from its progress toward peace."⁶²

Senator Claude Swanson sponsored the naval treaty in the Senate. Senator Borah, contrary to his usual role, strongly supported the treaty, as of course did Senators Reed and Robinson. Senators George H. Moses, Hiram Johnson, and Frederick Hale led the opposition. Senator Robinson "kept more or less in the background and contented himself with one brief speech in support of the treaty that was temperate and moderate--one of the most persuasive expositions of the reasons for accepting the treaty offered in the Senate."⁶³ He challenged the opposition to show how the position of the United States could relatively be improved by rejecting the treaty and asked it not to contribute to another armament race by refusing to ratify this pact.⁶⁴ The treaty was ratified 58 to 9 on July 21, 1930. The almost unanimous support which the Democratic senators gave to the treaty evidenced their confidence in Robinson's judgment.⁶⁵

⁶²Senate Document No. 312, Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., Special session, July 7, 1930, pp. 1-4.

⁶³Mark Sullivan, New York Evening Post, July 30, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

⁶⁴Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., Special session of the Senate, July 14, 1930, pp. 118-22.

⁶⁵Mark Sullivan, New York Evening Post, July 30, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

Mark Sullivan best summed up Robinson's part in the conference:

Senator Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas added to his reputation by his services on the American delegation to the naval conference in London. . . . Those who attended the London Conference said that he was one of the solidest and most practical minded members of the American delegation. He had a better sense of what the Senate would accept and what the people of the country would regard with satisfaction than any other member of the delegation. One of the excellent qualities of the Democratic floor leader is that he is never cheap. He never tries merely to be smart. He does not descend to claptrap. There is a certain dignity about him that he never forgets and he has great good sense. He doesn't say things that he has occasion to regret afterward. Along with sound judgment he has moral courage of a high order. He has more of the qualities of leadership than anyone else I can think of in the Senate.⁶⁶

Though Robinson spent several months in London, he kept close contact with friends and advisors at home. One such occasion concerned President Hoover's nomination of Charles Evans Hughes for Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Robinson leaned toward supporting Borah and the progressives in blocking the appointment. Robinson was motivated by purely partisan reasons. Baruch stressed the strong reaction that might result in rejecting a man of such outstanding ability and advised him to change his stand. Robinson heeded Baruch's advice and called Senator Swanson by trans-Atlantic telephone, and urged the Democrats to support the President. Thus the necessary votes were secured to confirm Hughes'

⁶⁶Ibid.

appointment.⁶⁷

While absent in London the Senator became concerned over his own re-election to the Senate, for a prominent lawyer, Tom W. Campbell, decided to run against him. The latter made accusations pertaining to his activities as a member of the law firm of Robinson, House & Moses and also tried to revive the old charges that Robinson was both a "wet" and a sycophant of Wall Street.⁶⁸ These charges failed to arouse any popular interest. Campbell later admitted that he knew many of the charges were untrue but was willing to use any method to be elected.⁶⁹ When Robinson returned from London and could leave Washington, he made a very limited number of speeches in Arkansas. A total of only \$3,525⁷⁰ was spent campaigning in contrast with \$100,000 or more the Senator estimated that the Ku Klux Klan had spent to defeat him.⁷¹ He polled approximately 180,000 out of 225,000 votes cast.⁷²

⁶⁷Ray Tucker, "Fighting Joe," The Country Home, January, 1931, Robinson Papers; Carter Field, Bernard Baruch: Park Bench Statesman (New York, 1944), 229.

⁶⁸St. Louis Post Dispatch, June 8, 1930, Robinson Clippings.

⁶⁹Interview, Tom W. Campbell, Little Rock, Arkansas, July 15, 1932.

⁷⁰Campaign contributors included B. M. Baruch, S. W. Rayburn, John G. Lonsdale of St. Louis, and state and local leaders, Robinson Papers.

⁷¹Robinson to Joseph P. Tumulty, August 13, 1930, ibid.

⁷²Robinson to Senator Carter Glass, August 23, 1930, ibid.

Encouraged by such an easy victory the Senator attacked the problems of his office with renewed vigor. Among these problems was drought relief which soon became the major issue in Congress. The summer of 1930 was exceedingly dry, no crops were harvested in many areas, and feed for livestock was scarce. Farm prices were low, and credit had been exhausted. The following report to Robinson was typical of conditions in the drought area:

Hundreds of families (Montgomery County Arkansas) are in a destitute condition without food or adequate clothing. . . . Entire families are subsisting on corn bread, turnips, and tops. Children are compelled to absent themselves from school for the reason that they have not shoes or proper clothing. The farmers are without corn or hay and have been compelled to turn their horses and mules upon the open range where many will perish this winter. Cattle, hogs, and sheep have either been slaughtered for food or sold at any price in order to provide funds for the purchase of provisions.

At this time, there exists no source of relief at the hands of the Red Cross or the Federal Government, and unless some immediate form of relief is provided, innumerable children and adults will die from starvation and exposure.⁷³

Not only Arkansas but twenty other states were suffering from the severe drought.

Deeply distressed by the results of the drouth and depression, Robinson was determined to challenge the laissez-faire philosophy of Hoover and the conservative Republicans on the question of drought relief legislation. In so doing he emerged as the nucleus of a group of nationally known

⁷³L. L. Beavers to Robinson, November 30, 1930, ibid.

Democrats who pledged their party's cooperation with the Republicans to work out an effective program for national economic and drought relief.⁷⁴ In December of 1930, Robinson introduced several measures to aid drought-stricken areas. Most bitterly contested of these was Bill S.4786. It provided \$60,000,000 to be advanced to drought-stricken farmers for seed, feed, and other necessary supplies; \$5,000,000 for road construction; \$3,500,000 for agricultural extension service and for the Federal Farm Board's free distribution of wheat through Red Cross agencies. This bill caused considerable dissension in that no single interpretation of "other necessary supplies" could be agreed upon. Robinson interpreted it to include food and clothing if necessary, and in an effort to dispel disagreement successfully pushed through Senate Joint Resolution 211 which provided food for the farmers' families as well as feed for livestock. President Hoover issued a statement that "prosperity can not be restored by raids upon the Public Treasury," and vowed that the resolution would never pass the House.

The harsh rebukes of the press toward the President's stand on agricultural loans reflected the anger that Hoover had provoked in casting aspersions upon the political motives

⁷⁴Alfred E. Smith, John W. Davis, James M. Cox, John Raskob, Jouett Shouse, John N. Garner, and Joe T. Robinson; Elliott Roosevelt, F. D. R. His Personal Letters: 1928-1945 (New York, 1950), I, 155.

of the Democratic senators. The Hoover-Robinson feud steadily grew hotter as the Senator struck a pose of magnanimity and sincerity:

The President lost his temper and made a statement that, of course, is to be condemned. For my part, I do not propose to follow the bad example that has been set. My purpose is to try to do my duty to my party, to my people, and most of all, to my country. . . .

Congress has a great task before it. The Nation is facing a crisis. Our responsibility is the greatest we have ever encountered. Bearing it in the spirit of true patriots, we shall not find it necessary to abandon the principles which we believe should prevail in the administration of this great Government.⁷⁵

Conferees of the House and Senate met to adjust differences in the two versions of the relief bill. The House passed the measure for \$30,000,000 instead of \$60,000,000, changed "livestock" to "workstock" and struck out the word "food" in the measure. The Senate conferees succeeded in securing agreement to a compromise of \$45,000,000 for relief of drought-stricken areas. The House also agreed to add the words "for such purposes incident to crop production as may be prescribed." Senator Alben Barkley intimated that the substitution would permit the President to save "face" because of his "pure, stubborn pride."

Robinson asked the Senate to accept the compromise in order to secure credit facilities in time for the crop year at hand. Additional money, he said, could later be

⁷⁵Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., 3 sess., December 10, 1930, p. 501.

appropriated. The latitude in wording permitted Secretary Hyde to use his own discretion as to the use of funds "for other purposes," including food and even clothing. Secretary Hyde then announced that his interpretation was that none of the \$45,000,000 could be used to purchase food. Senator Caraway of Arkansas then presented an amendment authorizing an appropriation of \$15,000,000 for federal distribution of food, to the farmers, and the Senate passed the amendment on January 5, 1931. Hoover opposed this amendment because he judged it to be a dole and not a loan. Robinson said, "As I visualize it, the problem of relief is credit, not charity. It is encouragement, not humiliation. . . . We will not accomplish anything . . . by feeding a mule or a cow and at the same time . . . let human beings starve or accept meager charity."⁷⁶ However, since the House was under Hoover's control, it also rejected the Caraway amendment.

Senator McNary introduced the President's counter measure. It provided for \$25,000,000 but also eliminated food for individuals. Robinson and Black retaliated with a \$25,000,000 relief amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations Bill for distribution of food by the Red Cross.⁷⁷ The Red Cross, however, turned about face and declined to distribute goods purchased by government funds; the House also

⁷⁶Ibid., January 16, 1931, p. 2359.

⁷⁷Ibid., January 14, 1931, p. 2147.

rejected this amendment.

After President Hoover's public disapproval of the Robinson-Black amendment, Senator David Reed made a statement that Hoover's solution was to open a public drive for \$10,000,000 for the Red Cross relief fund; he censured Robinson for requesting government funds for drought victims stating that the passage of this amendment would absolutely wreck the Red Cross drive. He did, however, consent to vote on the measure in three weeks if the Red Cross drive failed. Robinson felt a postponement only meant an unnecessary delay and added suffering for thousands. He believed that the Federal supplement of \$25,000,000 was necessary since Congress would not permit food loans on the 1931 crop.

As minority leader, Robinson called a conference of Democratic senators and they adopted a specific, detailed policy for which they intended to fight--"sink or swim." The policy included the \$25,000,000 amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill, \$15,000,000 food loan, the distribution of the government owned wheat, \$5,000,000 of the \$45,000,000 to provide capital to create agricultural and livestock loan credit corporations, \$3,000,000 for rural sanitation and the reappropriation of money collected in 1930 from farm loans to relief. The Senator expressed the hope that an extra session of Congress could be avoided. He announced that the policy adopted by the committee was not issued as a threat

but as a fair declaration of the intended purpose of the Democratic party in the Senate.⁷⁸ While the amendment was pending before the House, the National chairman of the Red Cross made the next move by stating the organization could not distribute federal funds either. Senator Caraway labeled this action "a political screen" behind which the President could shirk his responsibility to care for the suffering and starving.

Public response to the policies of the President and the National Red Cross showed strong disapproval. The Washington Daily News opposed the action of the National Central Committee in refusing to administer government funds and called upon the President "to rescue the Red Cross from the political mud into which it is slipping under his administration."⁷⁹

The New York Evening World denounced the "strange action" of the Red Cross in refusing to administer the \$25,000,000: "It is nothing less than a tragedy that the Red Cross is being used, with its consent, for political purposes. . . . The action it has just taken will shock millions, and if it results in weakening the confidence of the public calamity."⁸⁰ The St. Louis Star harangued the government

⁷⁸Ibid., January 30, 1931, pp. 3576-77.

⁷⁹Washington News, January 30, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

⁸⁰New York Evening World, January 29, 1931, ibid.

for its utter indifference to human suffering with its storage bins housing 100,000,000 bushels of wheat "while a million people vainly begged for flour in their cupboards and bread in their stomachs."⁸¹ The Richmond Times-Dispatch called the squabbling between the Senate and the President "disgraceful," advising that "Robinson and his followers should disregard all fear of consequences in their fight for the relief appropriation."⁸²

Impatient with the wranglings of Congress and stimulated by public censorship of the Red Cross, Senator Robinson called upon the Senate to take an effective action whatever it might be, in this period of great national distress.⁸³ Democratic strategy was well planned, the Interior Department Appropriations bill with the Robinson-Black amendment, was sent back to the House where it was promptly rejected. Then, a conference was called where the joint committee approved an appropriation of \$20,000,000 to be administered by the Secretary of Agriculture. He was authorized to allocate funds to establish local agricultural-credit corporations which would advance loans to farmers for the production of the 1931 crop and for agricultural rehabilitation in the

⁸¹St. Louis Star, January 31, 1931, ibid.

⁸²Richmond Times-Dispatch, February 3, 1931, ibid.

⁸³Cong. Rec., 71 Cong., 3 sess., January 28, 1931, p. 3372.

drought and storm stricken areas. The Secretary was to be sole judge as to what security was adequate to grant such loans.

Robinson supported the compromise because its effectiveness could be realized in time for the spring crop and it would avoid calling an extra session of Congress. His meeting with President Hoover was substantiated by his reading into the record a letter from the President:

As to our conversation this morning, I am glad to confirm at once that the proposed additional drought-relief measure was suggested for the purposes of real aid to the weakened credit situation in the drought area and that in the administration of it the Secretary of Agriculture assures me he has no other intention, and that he will interpret it fairly and sympathetically.⁸⁴

The Washington Star, a Republican paper, supported the Robinson compromise, which really was what he had demanded at first--greater credit facilities for crop production. The editorial closed, "The Democratic leader of the Senate has shown himself, in the crisis which he faced, capable of real leadership."⁸⁵ Reactions were not all favorable, of course. The newspaper Labor accused Robinson of playing into the hands of the Old Guard and the administration, and labeled the "Arkansas" compromise as no more legal than the Missouri Compromise.⁸⁶

⁸⁴Ibid., February 9, 1931, p. 4318.

⁸⁵Washington Star, February 10, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

⁸⁶Labor (Washington, D. C.), February 17, 1931, ibid.

The Senate accepted the conference report by a vote of 67 to 15. This battle had lasted a long time and was a bitter one, but the outcome was worth the struggle. Senator Robinson stated that the compromise on Emergency Drought Relief made available an aggregate of \$69,000,000. These efforts of Robinson, Caraway, and others marked the end of an era when private charity cared for those in need and the beginning of a shift of responsibility to state and federal controlled agencies.⁸⁷

Agriculture was only one phase of America's economic life that had been adversely affected during the Hoover administration. The stock market crash of October, 1929, broke with such unprecedented severity that a melancholia descended upon a world that little suspected what was in store for it. "Farm prices went to the devil, banks began to crash and close their doors, savings disappeared and great unemployment became wide spread throughout the country."⁸⁸ Business failures were prevalent, causing numerous suicides. The situation was precarious, and there seemed to be no silver lining visible.

Senator Robinson was deeply concerned about this tragic condition and felt the Republican party had failed to take adequate steps to prevent this economic collapse. He analyzed some of the causes as follows: he attributed

⁸⁷New York World, January 30, 1931, ibid.

⁸⁸Connally and Steinberg, My Name Is Tom Connally, 134.

unemployment to the entrance of women into industry during World War I and the rise of technological unemployment;⁸⁹ he recognized the effects of debasement of silver and the reorganization of industry;⁹⁰ he considered the problem one of under-consumption rather than over-production and blamed the tariff for preventing disposal of our surplus products on the world market.⁹¹

Though Robinson and his party had no magic "cure-all" to offer, the Senator had many strong convictions concerning the issues at stake. Even in spite of the farmers' dilemma he encouraged the "back to the land" movement and diversification of crops as a means of living.⁹² He advocated radical economies in public expenditures on state and national levels in order to balance the budget. The credit of the country had to be restored even though it necessitated application of drastic measures.⁹³

Robinson placed part of the responsibility on the shoulders of American investors by stating "recovery can not

⁸⁹Address before the Arkansas State Teachers Association, Little Rock, April 17, 1930, Robinson Papers.

⁹⁰Address before the National Stone Crushers Association, St. Louis, January 21, 1931, ibid.

⁹¹Address before the Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, New York City, March 17, 1931, ibid.

⁹²Address before the National Stone Crushers Association, January 21, 1931, ibid.

⁹³Robinson to Baruch, January 7, 1932, ibid.

be accomplished until the enormous volume of money that has been withdrawn from use and hoarded has been restored to circulation."⁹⁴ He further suggested that controls on business be tightened. This suggestion provoked criticism for many believed that big business should be encouraged to make money.⁹⁵ Of course several Democratic senators grumbled that Robinson was "too restrained and too conservative."⁹⁶

President Hoover outlined the administration's relief plan: it included a revolving fund for banks, a finance corporation (the RFC), expanded credit facilities for banks, and capital advances to farm lending agencies. Senator Robinson was particularly interested in the creation of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation which proved to be the most effective relief measure. Its original purpose was not to create a great central banking institution to finance new enterprises but to enable distressed corporations to meet their obligations when it was impossible to obtain loans from the banks. While he did not approve giving unlimited powers to RFC, he did wish to give it "reasonable" and "liberal"

⁹⁴Address, Willard Hotel, March 6, 1932, ibid.

⁹⁵Urbana Daily Courier (Illinois), June 23, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

⁹⁶Elliott Thurston, "Politics from the Sidelines," New York World, January 18, 1931; New York Times, November 22, 1931, ibid.

powers.⁹⁷ The theory of the RFC was that it would make loans to reopen closed banks, to revive the activity of other banks and credit institutions so that they might supply loans to merchants and manufacturers.⁹⁸ Since the RFC would be of great benefit to state and city agencies in reducing unemployment relief, he actively supported its passage.⁹⁹ The RFC board consisted of seven members, including Eugene Meyer, governor of the Federal Reserve Board, and Charles G. Dawes (who did not seek the appointment, but accepted at Hoover's insistence).¹⁰⁰ As an assurance that the lending agency would be bipartisan and nonpartisan, he promised Garner and Robinson the privilege of each naming a director. They submitted the names of Jesse Jones and Harvey C. Couch.¹⁰¹

After the RFC measure was passed, the battle for governmental economy was renewed. Top level Democrats, Robinson, Baruch, Owen D. Young, and Hugh Johnson with the Republican party members urged President Hoover to agree to the plan that Robinson sponsored. With the President's

⁹⁷Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 1 sess., January 18, 1932, p. 2138.

⁹⁸Robinson to C. M. Anderson, March 2, 1932, Robinson Papers.

⁹⁹Memphis Commercial Appeal, July 11, 1933, stated: "The Creation of the RFC was due largely to Senator Robinson's efforts," Robinson Clippings.

¹⁰⁰Robinson to Edward N. Hurley, February 22, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹⁰¹Timmons, Jesse H. Jones: The Man and the Statesman, 163.

reluctant acceptance, Robinson introduced the plan as Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 16 providing for the commission to investigate methods of reducing expenditures and to recommend consolidation or abolishment of such agencies and bureaus as seemed practical.¹⁰²

Then on March 8, 1932, President Hoover announced that a drastic economy program would be instituted in order to balance the budget and prevent the exhaustion of sources of private capital by the issuance of federal bonds.

Senator Robinson believed that the President's budget was unworkable and urged him to revise it.¹⁰³ Though the Democrats could offer no certain remedy for the economic depression, Robinson, as spokesman, presented a six-point program designed to restore the nation's economic status. This plan would prevent the investment of American capital in bankrupt foreign countries; it demanded cancellation of obligations due from foreign countries in order to assure world stabilization. It also called for negotiation of reciprocal tariff arrangements and abandonment of prohibitive duties under the Hawley-Smoot Tariff Act, and for the enforcement of anti-trust laws which would aid small business. He favored reduction of governmental expenditures and restraint of

¹⁰²Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 1 sess., February 12, 1932, p. 3808.

¹⁰³Robinson to Hugh Johnson, April 18, 1932, Robinson Papers.

declining commodity prices by stimulating consumption in domestic and foreign markets.¹⁰⁴

Baruch and Hugh Johnson collaborated with Robinson in formulating Democratic policy. Baruch, in addition, insisted upon a five hundred million dollar cut in the budget and a general sales tax.¹⁰⁵ But the sales tax had already been rejected once in the House even by the Democrats.¹⁰⁶

As economic conditions grew worse, one element in Congress pressed for an inflationary program.¹⁰⁷ Before a plan could be formulated, however, Hoover sent a message to Congress to be incorporated in an Economy Bill calling for a joint committee to work with the Executive Department in order to balance the budget, to work out a program of economy, and to cut the budget by two hundred million dollars. Robinson criticized Hoover for attempting to avoid responsibility by appointing this bipartisan commission and warned that reduction of governmental salaries would be blocked by the most powerful lobby that had ever existed in this country.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴Address, Jefferson Day, Washington, D. C., April 13, 1932, ibid.

¹⁰⁵Baruch to Robinson, April 16, 1932, ibid.

¹⁰⁶Robinson to Baruch, March 13, 21, 1932, ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., April 18, 1932.

¹⁰⁸Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 1 sess., April 4, 1932, p. 7367.

A second message from Hoover specified cuts in expenditures for road building and for supply bills, recommended the dismissal of 50,000 to 100,000 employees, and asked for authority to consolidate various bureaus in the interest of economy.¹⁰⁹ Senator Robinson considered the President's request one of "extraordinary power, an unusual authority to grant an Executive."¹¹⁰ However, he offered to co-operate with the Republicans in the crisis:

I do believe it is necessary to balance the Budget; and in order to accomplish that I think we will levy taxes which will prove very burdensome, which will cause great vexation, which will stimulate the rising tide of resentment against the Congress of the United States. Nevertheless, the task must be performed. . . . I should like to have my constituents feel that . . . my efforts . . . are well intended and earnestly made.¹¹¹

Senator David Reed responded to Robinson's offer of assistance by saying, "I think the country will be encouraged by the declaration of the Senator from Arkansas, the Democratic leader here, that there is going to be no partisanship in this most important matter of a balanced Budget."¹¹² Governor Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania criticized Robinson's co-operation with the conservative Republicans: ". . . the Democratic leader . . . goes to the White House for orders

¹⁰⁹Ibid., May 5, 1932, p. 9641.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 9642.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Ibid.

more often than the Republican leader. . . . To all intents and purposes, Robinson is not a Democrat. In everything but name he is a stand-pat Republican."¹¹³

Under Robinson's leadership, the Democrats co-operated with the Republicans in passing Hoover's one-year moratorium on war debts; also Congress appropriated \$200,000,000 for the Veterans Administration and \$125,000,000 for Deficiency Appropriation and donated 40,000,000 bushels of wheat to the Red Cross for distribution to destitute farmers.

President Hoover signed the Economy Bill on June 30, though he protested that several of his recommended economies were not included. In reply, Robinson offered a resolution requesting the President to submit specific suggestions for each recommended reduction, and the Senate passed the resolution without a dissenting vote. In explanation of his stand, Robinson declared:

. . . I want the country to know that the Executive has not only had full opportunity to make definite suggestions for further reductions in Federal expenditures but that he has been invited to do so by the Senate . . . in a resolution unanimously adopted. He has made no definite suggestions and contents himself with the declaration that he is disappointed.¹¹⁴

Robinson co-operated further with the administration in sponsoring the Emergency Construction and Relief Act, of which he was co-author with Wagner, Pittman, Walsh, and

¹¹³Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), March 6, 1932.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

Bulkley. This act provided the states with loans and grants to relieve unemployment and to construct self-liquidating projects. Robinson complained in a letter to Baruch, however, that the President was taking credit for the relief legislation which his committee had worked so hard to pass.¹¹⁵

The willingness of Robinson and other Democrats to co-operate with the Republicans was only one indication of a widening breach in the solidarity of the Democratic party. This dissension came to a head at the time of the Washington meeting of the Democratic National Committee in March, 1931, over the prohibition question. The faction led by Raskob, Shouse, and Smith wanted to force the issue and go on record demanding the repeal of the 18th Amendment. Robinson's opinion was that the precipitation of this issue would create sharp differences which might prove irreconcilable.¹¹⁶

The National Committee met at the Mayflower Hotel to consider party politics and finances, and Chairman Raskob opened the meeting with a statement which immediately precipitated a bitter dispute. He recommended retention of the 18th Amendment but advocated another amendment to permit any individual state to retain or reject prohibition by referendum.

¹¹⁵Robinson to Baruch, July 7, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹¹⁶Robinson to Vincent Miles, February 20, 1932,
ibid.

Further lack of party harmony was evidenced by Raskob's statements on economic issues. His views on labor, capital, agriculture, and industrial combinations, as reported later by the World-Telegram, "could have been written by the Power Trust or the Republican reactionaries."¹¹⁷

Robinson was determined to maintain party harmony and to block any resolution approving the Raskob-Smith position on the prohibition issue. Arising from his seat next to Jim Farley, he advanced to the rostrum and said:

In my judgment, this crisis has been needlessly and unwisely precipitated. Someone has said that Herbert Hoover . . . has rendered more assistance to the Democratic party . . . than any other human agency. And now I fear that our beloved chairman has paid him back and rendered assistance to the Republican party.¹¹⁸

Robinson asserted that the National Committee, as an administrative body, could not accept or reject controversial issues, but must carry out party mandates. He repudiated the leadership of Raskob with this warning: "You cannot write on the banner of the Democratic party, however much you may desire to do so, the skull and cross-bones, emblematic of an outlawed trade, and expect the masses of the Democrats to accept your recommendation without resistance."¹¹⁹

By this denunciation of Raskob, Robinson retained

¹¹⁷New York World-Telegram, editorial, March 6, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

¹¹⁸New York Times, March 6, 1931, ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

his undisputed leadership of the Southern dry forces and emerged as a potential candidate for the presidency. However, he had no illusions about his own chances and had no intention of becoming a candidate.¹²⁰ As it developed, Robinson by this stand weakened the control of Raskob, Shouse, and Smith over the Democratic party; and this may well have been the turning point which led to the selection of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as the Democratic presidential nominee.¹²¹

On January 14, 1932, Robinson issued a Victory Campaign statement which the national committee requested to be read at every Victory Campaign Dinner throughout the country. The message emphasized the harmonious relations that must exist within the party. The Senator feared the possibility of a convention deadlock, such as had existed in 1920 and 1924.¹²² As would be expected, political strategy demanded that the Democratic party begin seeking the strongest candidate for the nomination. Robinson, Baruch, Young, Garner, Harrison, and others met to consider possibilities.¹²³

Newton D. Baker was apparently Robinson's first

¹²⁰ Robinson to John T. Burkett, January 26, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹²¹ Basil Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-1938 (New York, 1944), 30.

¹²² Robinson to Rees P. Horrocks, April 18, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹²³ Robinson to Baruch, April 22, 1932, ibid.

choice, but his personal friend, John Nance Garner, was also an avowed candidate. Roosevelt was not a favorite with Robinson,¹²⁴ but he would not be a party to any movement to "stop" Roosevelt or any other recognized candidate for the nomination.¹²⁵

The Chicago convention was historic in many ways. On the fifth ballot in order to prevent a deadlock, Garner released his delegates to Roosevelt. Then McAdoo pledged California's vote to Roosevelt and regained his popularity.

Robinson did not attend the convention. He felt that his presence was needed in Washington to hold the few Democrats there in line and to push through necessary relief legislation. Robinson approved Roosevelt's action in abolishing the old custom of being formally notified of his selection by flying to Chicago and personally addressing the convention.¹²⁶

Before the Senate on July 15, 1932, Robinson compared the platforms of the Republican and Democratic parties. He approved the administration of RFC, Roosevelt's reforestation plan for the Western or semi-arid lands, and Democratic plans to aid the unemployed and to support agricultural relief.

¹²⁴John T. Burkett to Robinson, February 8, 1932, ibid.

¹²⁵Robinson to John E. Martineau, March 28, 1932, ibid.

¹²⁶Robinson to J. S. Utley, July 7, 1932, ibid.

He advocated federal supervision of security offerings, closer regulation of governmental expenditure, and a downward revision of the tariff. He criticized the Republican-sponsored moratorium and cancellation of foreign war debts. He ridiculed the 1928 Republican campaign slogans such as "We have abolished poverty," and "A Chicken for Every Pot," and looked upon the promises of the full dinner pail, the full gasoline tank, and a car in every back yard as visionary. After he broke down the Republican conception of Hoover as "The Miracle Man," the Senator recommended the Roosevelt program as the only means of salvation: "I do believe that with a new deal, with a change of administration, with the application of the principles in the Democratic program which I have described, better times will come, equality of opportunity will be enjoyed, unemployment will be diminished."¹²⁷

That same week Robinson released through the Bureau of Publicity of the Democratic National Committee, a statement which charged the Republicans with claiming credit for legislation of Democratic authorship, such as the Emergency Relief Act. He included the new tax bill and the Economy Act which owed its passage fully as much to the efforts of Democratic members as to any Republican members.¹²⁸

¹²⁷Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 1 sess., July 15, 1932, p. 15433.

¹²⁸Bureau of Publicity, Democratic National Committee, July 17, 1932, Robinson Papers.

The Senator's participation in the campaign was limited to a few speeches in Arkansas, Missouri, Indiana, Illinois, and Kentucky where he discussed such topics as the federal deficit, farm financing problems, reciprocal tariffs, and anti-trust laws. In each case it was the same story of Republican failure and a great opportunity for the Democrats to take corrective action. Robinson's prediction of an overwhelming victory in November was fully realized. Robinson pledged his support to the Roosevelt administration, and Roosevelt expressed his appreciation by saying, "You may be sure that I am counting on your advice and counsel in the great days that are to come."¹²⁹

In the short session of Congress opening December 3, 1932, Robinson pledged the Democrats in the Senate to live up to the obligations of the recent election. The same message was repeated December 12 during a Radio Forum arranged by the Washington Star and NBC. He promised quick legislative action for unemployment relief, the proposed beer tax, and farm relief. Every possible effort would be made, he said, to pursue "a sound and constructive policy," which would be designed to build up "renewed confidence" among the people.¹³⁰

¹²⁹Roosevelt to Robinson, November 19, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹³⁰Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 2 sess., December 13, 1932, p. 369.

The period from November, 1932, to March 4, 1933, marked a period of formulation of Democratic legislation by Congressional leaders and the presentation of this program to President-elect Roosevelt for approval. On January 5, 1933, Congressional leaders including Garner and Senators Robinson, Pittman, Hull, Byrnes, and Harrison, and Representatives Henry T. Rainey, John McDuffie, James M. Collier, Sam Rayburn, and Joseph Byrnes met with Roosevelt at his New York home and went over in detail the legislative program for the "lame duck" session of Congress. In general they proposed to balance the budget by reducing the appropriations by \$100,000,000, re-enact the gasoline tax for \$137,000,000 in revenue and proposed to enact a beer tax to produce \$125,000,000, and a proposal to lower exemption from \$2500 to \$2000 and raise the rate from 4 and 8 per cent to 6 and 12 per cent. Roosevelt made it clear to the reporters that this program was generally that of Congressional leaders and that he gave only his tacit approval. Robinson was hopeful that these measures would be passed and avoid an extra session of Congress after March 4, 1933.¹³¹ After the party discussion, the Washington Morning Star pictured the returning Congressional leaders as Roosevelt replicas in various hats and suits as if to say that already the New Yorker's

¹³¹New York Times, January 6, 1933, Robinson Clippings.

dominant influence was being felt.¹³²

It was at this session that Roosevelt heard of the Robinson-Garner conference with President Hoover and Secretary Mills over the passage of the Glass bill as quickly as possible to assist RFC in withstanding the rising financial storm. A few days later Roosevelt changed his position, and this change embarrassed the working relationship of Robinson and Garner with President Hoover.¹³³

With the approval of President-elect Roosevelt, Robinson proposed on January 20, 1933, a measure to save the farms from foreclosure. The plan provided for a system of "conciliation commissioners" representing the courts to bring the farmer and mortgagee together for adjustment or extension of the debt. Thus expensive foreclosure proceedings would be avoided. The Robinson plan made the law flexible in each case and prevented further disruption of the national economic system by mass foreclosures.¹³⁴ Robinson appeared before the Senate banking subcommittee supporting this temporary program until a more permanent program could be worked out. However, the accomplishments of the short session were limited by some Republicans and Democrats who followed Senator Long in block-

¹³²Washington Morning Star, January 7, 1933, ibid.

¹³³Timmons, Jesse H. Jones: The Man and the Statesman, 178.

¹³⁴Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), January 22, 1933.

ing much of the business of the Senate.¹³⁵

Robinson, at the beginning of the Roosevelt administration, was already entrenched in a position of prestige which he had attained in spite of the long Republican reign. His power had been perhaps second only to that of Hoover.¹³⁶ According to Senator Watson, Robinson had been for four years one of the "manipulators of a Progressive-Democratic coalition that . . . wielded the power of the majority in the Senate."¹³⁷ In making plans for the new administration, Roosevelt seriously considered Robinson for the position of Secretary of State along with Pittman, Hull, Young, Baruch, and Robert W. Bingham. He decided, however, that Robinson would be more valuable as Senate majority leader.¹³⁸

The new Majority Leader faced a difficult task in replacing Senators Thomas J. Walsh, Claude A. Swanson, and Cordell Hull for important committee assignments and in addition he must shuffle his personnel to satisfy a host of ambitions for committee chairmanships.¹³⁹ Robinson wanted the

¹³⁵Robinson to Isaac McClellan, January 16, 1933, Robinson Papers.

¹³⁶Elliott Thurston, "Politics From the Sidelines," New York World, January 18, 1931, Robinson Clippings.

¹³⁷Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 2 sess., February 6, 1933.

¹³⁸Raymond Moley, After Seven Years (New York, 1939), 111.

¹³⁹Washington Star, February 22, 1933, Robinson Clippings.

chairmanship of the Rules Committee and intended to assign Pat Harrison the ranking Democrat to the chairmanship of the Finance Committee. The selection of Senator John B. Kendrick of Wyoming as assistant leader reflected Robinson's influence in the Democratic caucus.

CHAPTER XI

ROBINSON AND THE NEW DEAL

March 4, 1933, found the American people eagerly awaiting the inauguration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and anxiously praying that the new executive would have an immediate panacea to offer for the economic crisis. On that memorable day his words were not idle boasts or alluring promises but the calm, determined assurances of a new leader. He addressed the entire American people over a nation-wide hook-up and offered a solution to the dire situation by asking for an unprecedented delegation of authority:

This great Nation will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper. . . . The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. . . . Our common difficulties . . . concern, thank God, only material things. Values have shrunk to fantastic levels; taxes have risen; our ability to pay has fallen; government of all kinds is faced by serious curtailment of income; the means of exchange are frozen in the currents of trade; . . . farmers find no markets for their produce; the savings of . . . thousands of families are gone . . . a host of unemployed citizens face the grim problem of existence, and an equally great number toil with little return.

I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require. . . . I shall ask Congress for . . . broad executive power to wage a war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given

to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe.¹

Robinson hailed the President's inaugural message as an answer to America's need for leadership:

I think every American citizen who heard or read those words felt the thrill of them. They were the answer to his prayer for leadership, for they told him that there had come to the head of the Government a man who recognized the perils of the period and meant not only to meet them but to conquer them.²

Robinson had no fear that Roosevelt would be a dictator in exercising power to cope with this economic emergency: "It isn't lust of power that moves him; it is a desire to get things accomplished before the machine collapses."³

Having gained the confidence of the American people, the President set the Federal machinery of the United States government into operation to meet the country's most pressing economic problems. He declared a "bank holiday" by closing all banks, the Federal Reserve branch banks, the building and loan associations, and the credit unions, until Congress should convene on March 9. Banking legislation was scheduled to take precedence over all other measures when Congress convened.

Upon Robinson fell the duty of advising Roosevelt on legislative strategy, marshaling the forces of the majority,

¹First Inaugural Address, Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York Times, March 5, 1933, Robinson Clippings.

²Washington Star, March 7, 1933, ibid.

³Ibid.

interpreting the President's legislative program to Congress, and directing the tactics which transformed legislative ideas into law.⁴ Roosevelt generally directed the passage of the Emergency Banking Act which prohibited export of gold, silver, and currency, and controlled the reopening of unsound banks. It also authorized issuance of additional Federal Reserve notes. Senator Robinson specifically piloted this measure through the Senate so successfully that it was passed in less than three hours and fifteen minutes. Robinson defended this bill against the caustic criticism of Senator Long, who charged the President with responsibility for existing banking conditions and insisted upon the immediate reopening of both state and national banks. Robinson declared that it was difficult to determine the solvency of each bank so quickly.⁵

The Glass-Steagall Bill, which had been introduced during the Hoover Administration but had been tabled, was now revised and resubmitted. It separated investment banking from commercial banking; established the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation which guaranteed deposits up to \$5000 in banks whose solvency qualified them for such protection, and authorized the Federal Reserve Board to set interest rates

⁴Washington Post, April 26, 1933, ibid.

⁵Cong. Rec., 73 Cong., 1 sess., April 11, 1933, p. 1481.

and govern excessive speculation with borrowed money.

Robinson supported the Glass-Steagall Bill, but his duties required him to remain in the background. Under his direction the powerful Rules Committee decided the order in which bills would be considered. His speeches were usually limited to short, specific statements which clarified the measures. Robinson's task was to make the bills of the "Brain Trust" acceptable to the entire Senate. Franklyn Waltman, Jr., spoke of him as "a veritable slave driver, keeping the Senate's nose to the grindstone."⁶

Though Senator Robinson had been freely associated with the more liberal groups in previous administrations, he appeared rather conservative in comparison to the New Dealers and the "Brain Trusters."⁷ In a letter to Baruch Robinson confessed that some of the measures had not been entirely "tasteful" to him, but that he followed the policy of disposing of them as rapidly as possible.⁸ He gave his support to every piece of New Deal legislation and guided it through so successfully that Charles G. Dawes described him as one bearing responsibilities seldom shouldered by America's political

⁶Franklyn Waltman, Jr., "Robinson Away, Senators Play," Washington Post, April 19, 1934, Robinson Clippings.

⁷For a discussion of the origin of the "Brain Trust" see Samuel I. Rosenman, Working with Roosevelt (New York, 1952), 56-66.

⁸Robinson to Baruch, May 5, 1933, Robinson Papers.

leaders.⁹

Robinson was frequently slated to defend the acts of the administration because he was an ardent and forceful speaker. At the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Robinson upheld the Roosevelt administration in a debate with Morris Hillquit, national chairman of the Socialist Party. The Senator said, "The economic wounds which lay wide open have been cauterized and are healing with a rapidity that indicates the presence of a healthy condition beneath, which only needs an opportunity to reassert itself for the nation to be on the way to recovery."¹⁰ He assured his listeners that the President had surrounded himself with men of brains and vision who would help him formulate plans for national progress as soon as the present emergency subsided.

The efficacy of the New Deal legislation to speed recovery was severely tested during the first years of Roosevelt's administration. Jesse H. Jones accused many bankers of failing to use their funds to the greatest advantage by refusing to participate fully in the recovery program.¹¹ The banks and private credit institutions in Robinson's

⁹Charles G. Dawes to Robinson, June 13, 1933, ibid.

¹⁰Debate, "Does the Democratic Party Hold any Substantial Hope for the American People," Brooklyn Academy of Music, Brooklyn, New York, March 13, 1933, ibid.

¹¹Speech, Jesse H. Jones, "Bankers' Part in Recovery," NBC radio, August 1, 1933, Robinson Papers.

judgment were blocking the way to national recovery by declining to make loans to private enterprise. Senator Robinson thought that extension of federal credit to the banks should have been dependent upon whether they were more liberal in making loans.¹²

As would be expected, Robinson was vitally interested in getting legislation to help farmers. In January, 1933, during the short session of Congress, Robinson had introduced Bill (S.5390) to provide federal capital for agricultural development, to refinance existing farm debts by long-term loans at low interest rates, and to re-purchase foreclosed lands. He pleaded that it would not only protect land values and present owners, but would also aid those who held farm mortgages in which they had invested their life savings.¹³ The situation had become so bad that neighborhood farmers were bidding in farms at foreclosure auctions at ridiculously low prices.¹⁴ Robinson had also supported another bill to raise cotton prices by reducing production of cotton, concentrating the surplus in one cooperative farm agency, and control its release for sale.¹⁵ Yet, as late as December, 1932,

¹²Robinson to E. A. Parker, March 5, 1934, ibid.

¹³Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 2 sess., January 11, 1933, p. 1551.

¹⁴Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 70.

¹⁵Cong. Rec., 72 Cong., 2 sess., February 18, 1933, p. 4384.

Robinson had not come to support federal restriction of farm acreage.¹⁶

Nevertheless by March, 1933, Robinson was willing to support the President in obtaining any kind of agricultural legislation which seemed to offer help to distressed farmers. When the Agricultural Adjustment Act was sent to Congress, Robinson declared that its purpose was:

. . . To jar the nation loose from the iron grip of economic depression by increasing agricultural purchasing power . . . by restoring the balance between production and consumption of farm products . . . to provide an incentive . . . by compensating the farmer in accordance with the reduction he effects in acreage or production. The funds . . . will come from a tax on the first processed form of each commodity whose production has been brought under control.¹⁷

Robinson did not view the measure as regimentation, for the individual participated on a voluntary basis. Neither did he feel that the bill exceeded the constitutional limitations of the authority of the President and the Secretary of Agriculture. The bill was signed in May, 1933, and the act became effective immediately. Limited production and the droughts of 1933 and 1934 did raise the price of basic commodities noticeably.

During the life of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, Robinson often defended the measure in the Senate. On one

¹⁶Robinson to J. E. Tull, December 27, 1932, Robinson Papers.

¹⁷Cong. Rec., 73 Cong., 1 sess., April 7, 1933, p. 1394.

occasion he stated: ". . . the fact remains that it has been the principal factor in raising and stabilizing the price of cotton and of other basic commodities, so that those prices are now two and in some cases three times as high as they were before the act was passed."¹⁸ He contended that the AAA saved the nation's agriculture from ruin and that the country could not return to uncontrolled production. That had been the weakness of the Agricultural Marketing Act of 1929, he said. The AAA, he argued, was predicated on the "parity price" plan which provided a margin of profit for the farmer. Speaker Bankhead of the House complimented Robinson's splendid defense of the AAA.¹⁹

When the AAA was invalidated (United States v. Butler, 297 U.S. 1), Robinson supported the expanded use of the Soil Conservation measure to meet the immediate needs of the farm control program. His support was based on a clearly recognized right of the Federal government to protect the nation's food supply.

Though the farmer received yearly benefits from the AAA and the Soil Conservation measure, his need for long-time loans was not being met. The Federal Land Bank district office at St. Louis had refused many legitimate loans in Illinois

¹⁸Ibid., 74 Cong., 1 sess., July 10, 1935, p. 11371.

¹⁹Ibid., 11421.

and Missouri, but particularly in Arkansas. Robinson was convinced that the personnel of the bank was at fault and should be replaced. He secured the appointment of F. W. Neimeyer as general agent. Robinson's conference with Senators from Missouri and Illinois in the Land Bank District led to a changed attitude of the bank's board of directors. By the spring of 1937, he felt assured that the bank was doing everything possible for its clients.²⁰

A related agricultural problem with which Robinson was vitally concerned was that of the tenant farmer. This group had suffered terribly during the depression, and even after the AAA had been passed some land owners had disregarded the rights and needs of tenants. Fearing the influence of radicalism, especially in his home state, he insisted that communistic and socialistic organizations had taken the opportunity to sow seeds of discontent and encourage the tenants to resort to violence.²¹ Many outsiders, including Mrs. J. B. Mitchison, English Labor Party member; Norman Thomas, leader of American socialism; and Sherwood Eddy of New York encouraged tenants to attack landlords. The local landlords with the support of city and county police units effectively dispersed the tenants, and little violence resulted. Reverend

²⁰Robinson to William D. Gray, April 17, 1937, Robinson Papers.

²¹Cong. Rec., 74 Cong., 1 sess., April 18, 1935, p. 5928.

Abner Sage of Marked Tree, Arkansas, secured employment for the transients locally.

Governor J. M. Futrell advised Robinson that the seriousness of the situation was overestimated. However, H. L. Mitchell organized the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union in July, 1934, and was accused of collecting excessive dues and spreading inflammatory literature. Mitchell called attention to problems of inadequate housing, low pay, and landlord-tenant sharecrop relations.²² He noted that the report made by Mrs. Mary Conner Myers of the AAA legal staff of the conditions on nine cotton plantations in Arkansas resulted in the swift removal of the entire AAA legal staff, and the suppression of the Myers' report. He voiced disapproval of AAA because it was injurious to all farm groups except large owners.²³

Robinson supported the Farmers Home Corporation, whose purpose was to give greater economic stability to farm tenants. He and Senator Bankhead were working on similar bills designed to check the increase of farm tenancy, to aid in rural rehabilitation, and to encourage the ownership of small homes. In order to facilitate the passage of such a measure, Robinson abandoned his own plans in favor of the

²²H. L. Mitchell and J. R. Butler, "The Cropper Learns His Fate," The Nation, Vol. CXLI (September 18, 1935), 328.

²³Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 168.

Bankhead Bill which provided for the acquisition of land by the Farmers' Home Corporation.

Senators Glass and Warren Austin felt that the Federal government could not become a common land owner within a state and that it would mean the "Russianization of the United States." Senator Schall of Minnesota, however, hailed the Bankhead Bill as the "greatest bulwark of individualism in the world" and "an insurance against communism and fascism." Bankhead asked that his act be considered as a long-term program designed to benefit the underprivileged class. In recommending the bill, Robinson said:

What the pending bill proposes to do is to change the status of many citizens from that of tenants to that of home owners. . . . Is it not better to give them the chance to have some independence, to move . . . and to establish themselves on small tracts of land which they may cultivate and which will constitute their own homes --thus giving them permanent places of residence.²⁴

The measure passed the Senate on June 24, 1935, and later became law.

Another effort in which Robinson played an important part to stabilize the tenant farmer was the establishment of the Resettlement Administration. Wallace, Tugwell, and others supported the policy to restore private ownership through government assistance in the purchase of lands. Resettlement projects were developed in multiple farm units

²⁴Cong. Rec., 74 Cong., 1 sess., April 24, 1935, p. 6497.

rather than in individual, separate farms as contemplated by Robinson. However, in the dedication of the resettlement project on the Wright Plantation, November 20, 1936, Robinson praised the Resettlement policy and stated, "Nothing, in my judgment, is better calculated to sustain the fundamental institutions upon which society and government in the United States rests, than the effective encouragement of home ownership."²⁵ It was chiefly through Robinson's efforts that appropriations for the Resettlement Administration were not drastically cut. It was necessary for him to defend its work in rural areas and the comparative results of these projects with other farm programs. For his efforts the Resettlement Administration often showed little appreciation.²⁶

One of the most important New-Deal measures was the National Industrial Recovery Act, directed by Hugh S. Johnson. This ambitious program to rehabilitate American industry "sought to stimulate the volume of business and improve working conditions by raising wages, reducing hours, and eliminating child labor, to drive out unfair destructive competitive practices, to conserve natural resources in

²⁵Address, "Farm Ownership," November 20, 1936, Robinson Papers.

²⁶Joe R. Brewer to H. Grady Miller, February 3, 1937; Robinson to James Gould, May 28, 1937; Robinson to H. D. Parker, June 7, 1937, ibid.; Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., February 2, 1937, pp. 678, 681.

certain basic commodities, and to relieve unemployment."²⁷ To assure these results each industry set up a fair code of practice and presented it to Hugh S. Johnson for approval. Robinson assisted materially in the passage of the measure but he doubted the wisdom of delegating so much authority to the President or of imposing restrictions on those industries that had not voluntarily submitted a code. He felt that this "smacked" of dictatorship. There was also a widespread feeling that large business received most of the benefits from NRA.

When Clarence S. Darrow released his investigative report of the New Deal, he wrote a blistering attack against the monopolistic tendencies in each industry and the destruction of small businessmen. He asserted that the government's sanction of self control on the part of industry inevitably meant control by the largest producers.²⁸ Johnson, on the other hand, defended the NRA because, he said, it protected thousands of small retail stores. He denied that the codes had been drawn up by large businesses and classified the opposition to NRA as "arrant buncombe based on a partisan or economic desire to wreck recovery."²⁹

²⁷Robert E. Cushman, Leading Constitutional Decisions (New York, 1940), 230.

²⁸Darrow and William O. Thompson, "Special and Supplementary Report to the President," May 3, 1934, released May 21, 1934, Robinson Papers.

²⁹Address, Hugh S. Johnson, Columbus, Ohio, May 4, 1934, ibid.

Robinson issued a noncommittal statement that only could be interpreted as a luke-warm stand for NRA.³⁰ On the floor of the Senate he demonstrated more interest, but still lacked any real enthusiasm for the program. Robinson felt that the act would vindicate itself by the promotion of the general welfare, and quoted from the Associated Press reports on the increased sales of steel, automobiles, and electrical appliances. He argued that monopolies created by cut-throat competition were forbidden under the codes, and that prices could be stabilized high enough to protect the wages of labor and to conserve small enterprises with limited sales volume and capital. Ninety per cent of the code provisions were designed for the protection of small enterprises, he said. Then he illustrated the effectiveness of the NRA by citing the number of new sawmills, small bituminous coal mines, small retail businesses, and independent theater houses that had started operation under its sponsorship. He asked for depth of understanding for NRA from its opponents and his colleagues, "if we are to proceed with national recovery; we must continue to administer this law solely with regard to the best interests of the public, . . . and we must . . . recognize the fact that the task is a very difficult one, one which involves the reversal of long-established customs and precedents and the adoption of new methods and pro-

³⁰Press release, n.d., ibid.

cesses."³¹

Robinson's speech lacked the power of conviction. On occasion he administered the duties of a majority leader, in a perfunctory manner. Perhaps the NRA was one of these measures; at any rate, he was obligated to see it through. Hugh S. Johnson called Robinson's defense of NRA "wonderful" and admitted that it "actually brought tears" to his eyes. In his own picturesque language he wrote Robinson:

When people have sacrificed and slaved as this organization has, and see a crew like that pretending to investigate their work, and not doing--pretending to be fair and suppressing everything except vituperation by a bunch of chisellers and worse--and then dignifying this scurrility by giving it the form of a report to the President, they are entitled to righteous indignation.³²

The Arkansas Gazette and the Fort Smith Times Record wanted to end price-fixing and production control and restore the old competitive system.

Even the Senator's secretary, Joe T. Robinson, II, felt that NRA had been administered in a monopolistic way:

No one can gain say the good effects--and there are many--yet, on the other hand only one whose selfish interests and those closed-minded ones whose interests preclude fair thinking and intelligent consideration can deny some of the evils that have arisen in connection with the enforcement of codes.³³

³¹Cong. Rec., 73 Cong., 2 sess., May 22, 1934, pp. 9440-41.

³²Hugh S. Johnson to Robinson, May 25, 1934, Robinson Papers.

³³Joe T. Robinson, II, to W. E. Womble, Sr., October 11, 1934, ibid.

The manager of Hotel Pines at Pine Bluff requested that hotels be removed from the NRA code control because they were not adhering to the codes anyway. He said, "I don't believe one per cent of the hotels in this section would have their doors open today and be in business had they complied 100 per cent with the NRA requirements."³⁴

In contrast, Clyde R. Croft, operator of the Arkansas Fertilizer Company with thirty-six years business experience, supported the continuation of the codes. He felt that they undoubtedly helped the "little man" and prevented panic in the market while encouraging orderly distribution of business.³⁵

Robinson, as always, valued the opinions of his constituents, and as their requests to extend the codes became more persistent he decided to support it:

It is my conviction that to permit the statute to lapse on June 16 would result in economic chaos respecting both labor and industry. Undoubtedly there have been many mistakes made in the administration of the Act, and if the measure is to be popularized it must be simplified.³⁶

The Supreme Court in May, 1935, in the Schechter case, declared certain portions of NRA unconstitutional on the grounds that it delegated legislative powers to the

³⁴W. N. Trulock to Robinson, March 12, 1935, ibid.

³⁵Clyde R. Croft to Robinson, April 20, 1935, ibid.

³⁶Robinson to R. B. Smith, May 13, 1935, ibid.

President and exceeded Congress's control over interstate commerce.³⁷ This decision brought many reactions. Baruch telegraphed Robinson: "I hope you are not unhappy about NRA as I think there is a great opportunity afforded to reform our lines in light of experience."³⁸ Personally, Robinson was not shaken by the decision and even seemed to have anticipated this action. He answered:

The NRA decisions have considerably "upset the apple cart." The President is very much disturbed--more so than I have ever known him to be. I think he fears that many industries will increase hours and reduce wages, and this will bring about numerous threats of labor disturbances and retardation of recovery.³⁹

The President hit back at the Supreme Court by declaring that it had relegated the United States to "the horse-and-buggy definition of interstate commerce." Robinson advocated the reenactment of several sections of the old NRA bill into new laws, i.e., the Guffey-Snyder Bituminous Coal Stabilization Act and the Wagner-Connery National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

The Robinson-Patman Act of 1936, the only major piece of legislation bearing Robinson's name, amended the Clayton Act of 1914. It made price discrimination among purchasers unlawful if the effect of such discrimination would lessen

³⁷Schechter v. United States, 295 U.S. 495.

³⁸Baruch to Robinson, May 30, 1935, Robinson Papers.

³⁹Robinson to Baruch, June 1, 1935, ibid.

competition, create a monopoly, or injure, prevent, or destroy competition. For twenty-six years Robinson had wanted to give the independent merchant, retailer, or wholesaler the same price benefits for the same purchase quantities as was being enjoyed by the largest chains.⁴⁰ Paul Fishback, secretary of the National Food Brokers Association, interpreted the act as a stabilizing factor in industry.⁴¹ Charles H. March, chairman of the Federal Trade Commission, pointed to this act and the Wheeler anti-basing point bill as indications of a revival of interest in the control of monopoly. The progressive elements in each party never lost sight of this interest. Prosecution and damages were secured more easily under the Robinson-Patman Act. The Federal Trade Commission in its enforcement of the act corrected many discriminations during the first year.⁴²

Robinson opposed the Miller-Tydings Resale Price Maintenance Act of 1937 which bound all retailers in states having fair-trade laws to the manufacturer's contract price. Robinson feared that abuse might arise under this act during

⁴⁰Wright Patman to Robinson, June 22, 1935, ibid.; address, Jonesboro, Arkansas, August 5, 1936, ibid.; Hilton D. Shepherd, Vernon A. Musselman, and Eugene H. Hughes, Introduction to Modern Business (New York, 1955), 471.

⁴¹New York Journal of Commerce, August 15, 1936, Robinson Clippings.

⁴²Address, Charles H. March, Pittsburgh, September 24, 1936; Robinson address before the National Food Brokers Association, Chicago, January 24, 1937, Robinson Papers.

a period of rising prices.⁴³

Throughout the depression, unemployment had been a problem of vital concern to Robinson. He valued the judgment of Robert F. Wagner of New York, who was considered one of the leading liberal exponents on unemployment and labor legislation. Robinson worked closely with Wagner in trying to solve these crucial problems. Robinson championed a work relief program for the urban unemployed and favored giving people bona fide jobs rather than doles. But he did not support the McCarran amendment to the President's \$4,880,000,000 relief bill even though backed by organized labor because it would force the Federal government to pay the prevailing wage in each area. Robinson thought the Federal rate should be lower in order to encourage those on relief to seek private employment and retire from the Federal relief rolls as soon as feasible. Union wages would make relief work so attractive that workers would shun private employment, and this would limit the usefulness of the funds. Although some people were not entitled to assistance, he felt that it was "almost inhuman to refuse to make any provision for the helpless and the distressed."⁴⁴

⁴³Robinson to Goodwin Drug Company, July 10, 1937, ibid.

⁴⁴Robinson to W. T. Dudley, April 20, 1935, ibid.; Cong. Rec., 74 Cong., 1 sess., February 20, 1935, p. 2286; March 15, 1935, p. 3699.

Another attempt to aid the laborer was the Black-Connery Bill which reduced the work week to thirty hours. This brought such a loud clamor from top-level industrialists that the administration restated its policy and Senator Robinson tried to appease management by opposing the Black-Connery Bill and by offering an amendment to allow a thirty-six-hour work week. In spite of his efforts the bill failed.

Labor was discontented because rival unions contested for the right of representation of the workers, and management opposed the organization of any union. Beginning in 1935 strikes broke out in industry to such a degree that the situation became acute. Appeals were made to the administration since agreements between the unions and management apparently could not be reached. Senator Wagner proposed his Labor Disputes Bill restricting company unions, but the very day it was up for final vote the steel strike ended. In the light of this development Roosevelt did not wish to deny management the use of company unions as bargaining agents and requested Senator Robinson to prevent the bill from coming to a vote. This Robinson did by engineering a substitute resolution that merely authorized elections and prosecutions.⁴⁵

During the 1935-1937 period of labor unrest, AF of L and CIO were battling management and federal or state governments for recognition or control. Roosevelt and Congressional

⁴⁵Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 135.

leaders tried to stand aloof from the matter. Robinson denounced the sit-down strike of 1937 as an illegal economic weapon, yet he left the impression that the administration's hands were tied until the Supreme Court rendered an opinion on the Wagner Labor Relations Act which was already law. Some of the press felt that the Senator was avoiding his responsibility. Administration leaders blamed the Supreme Court for the sit-down strike and labor trouble. Speaker Bankhead and Senator Robinson in particular were accused of using the "sit-down strikes as a pretext for giving the Supreme Court another thumping in the political arena."⁴⁶ The sit-down strikes also brought up the question of the legality of the use of federal troops to disperse strikers. Robinson believed that such action should not be taken except in case of interference with federal property or with the mails unless requested by the governor or state legislature.

Senator Robinson might well be called a liaison between labor and the administration. He blocked bills when they were not acceptable to the administration and at the same time he worked diligently with Senator Wagner and others to draft legislation that would be acceptable to labor.

Though Robinson was continuously involved with issues on the national level, he never lost sight of the needs of

⁴⁶New York American, June 16, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

his native state. Arkansas was one of the hardest hit by the depression and certainly needed assistance. When Harold C. Ickes of the Public Works Administration failed to allot Arkansas adequate funds, in Robinson's considered opinion, he criticized the Secretary severely and solicited the aid of the President.

President Roosevelt asked for a \$4,000,000,000 Public Works program to provide employment for those currently on relief rolls. It was out of this appropriation that many Arkansas cities benefited from projects for water works, sewers, auditoriums, post offices, and educational buildings. The Senator's influence was clearly illustrated by an article appearing in the Sunday issue of the New York Sun. It stated that ten states which were the backbone of the New Deal, including Arkansas, secured more funds than they paid into the federal treasury for the year ending June 30, 1935. Arkansas paid in the sum of \$3,178,317 and received \$16,948,000 in direct relief funds.⁴⁷ Such gigantic expenditures, necessitated by organizations like the PWA, created a growing opposition from business interests.

Despite the heavy expenditures of the Roosevelt Administration, there were those who felt that the New Deal did not go far enough to bring about reform and prosperity. Foremost among the attackers of the left were Upton Sinclair,

⁴⁷New York Sun, editorial, April 4, 1936, ibid.

Dr. Francis E. Townsend, Huey P. Long, and Father Charles E. Coughlin, who had sponsored many clubs at the grass-roots level and influenced the thinking of thousands of voters. Robinson strongly opposed the tax and spending schemes of Huey Long and the pension plan of Townsend. In various speeches he showed how each of the schemes violated economic principles and resorted to a type of economic magic. The fallacy of Townsend's scheme, he argued, was in the two per cent sales tax proposed to provide funds. This, he said, would paralyze all business and reduce revenue to the diminishing point. The Senator also considered Long's share-the-wealth plan as fundamentally communistic because it advocated confiscation of private property in its most blatant form. He said that any attempted seizure of private wealth for public distribution would disrupt the entire economy.⁴⁸ Hugh S. Johnson also lashed out at those who would follow the Pied Pipers--Long and Townsend.⁴⁹

While the President and administration supporters approved Robinson's answer to Long and Townsend, there were those who felt that the administration did not see the real problems.

⁴⁸Address, "Gilded Gateways to Economic Paradise," Drug, Chemical, and Allied Trades Association, New York, March 21, 1935, Robinson Papers.

⁴⁹Hugh S. Johnson, "Pied Pipers," Vital Speeches of the Day, I (March 11, 1935), 354-60.

One may have sympathy with the Administration in its irritation over Senator Long. What cannot be condoned is its strategy. Presumably Messrs. Johnson and Robinson . . . are "grasping the nettle." But they are ignorant of economic botany. Huey Long is not the nettle, he is only a person, and his importance does not lie in his personality but in the response of people to his appeal. The nettle to be grasped is the mal-distribution of economic power in America. It is the economic condition in which dividends rise and wages fall. It is the prospect of long years of misery at depressed wages. This is a nettle which General Hugh Robinson . . . has been blind to and cannot grasp because he does not know it is a nettle. Senator Robinson has been blind to it throughout his senatorial career. It is a nettle which some of the President's speech-writers once saw and promised to grasp, but the President is not using them any more.⁵⁰

Attacks upon Administration policies also came from conservative sources and Robinson again came quickly to the New Deal's defense when former President Hoover criticized governmental spending and failure to balance the budget. Robinson explained how the federal credit had been used to aid the farmer, the business man, and city and state governments and to relieve the unemployed. As he compared the unbalanced budgets of the Hoover and the Roosevelt administrations, he noted an essential difference: in the Hoover administration the nation had lacked sufficient income to pay taxes but in the Roosevelt administration the federal government had undertaken a significant reconstruction program to restore industry and agriculture and place money in the pockets of the American people. He gave Roosevelt credit for the

⁵⁰The Nation, Vol. CXL (March 20, 1935), 325.

steady rise in the standard of living and the stable price for federal bonds and concluded with this remark: "The credit of the Federal government is good, because of its chief executive, Mr. Roosevelt."⁵¹

During the 1936 presidential campaign, Robinson stated that the national credit remained unimpaired in spite of the enormous sums appropriated. He criticized Alfred N. Landon for supporting a continuation of federal unemployment relief and demanding a balanced budget. Yet, he commented: "Manifestly, the time is approaching when government expenses shall be kept within the revenues."⁵² In Robinson's opinion, Landon's promise to stimulate agricultural production by the payment of cash benefits equal to the protective tariff on manufactured goods and at the same time repeal the corporation undivided surplus profits tax would accomplish only one thing--a budget greatly out of balance.⁵³

Throughout Roosevelt's first administration, the tremendous expenditures always perturbed Senator Robinson even though he was frequently called upon to defend them. Early in 1934, he wrote, "Unquestionably the continued indiscriminate spending by the Government must cease. . . . If all

⁵¹Address, "Boondoggling and Budget Balancing in Relation to Prosperity," CBS radio, March 12, 1936, Robinson Papers.

⁵²Address, Nashville, Tennessee, July 29, 1936, ibid.

⁵³Address, "Fulfillment of Platform Pledges," Canton, Ohio, October 14, 1937, ibid.

requests were granted, even the printing presses could not supply enough money."⁵⁴ That same year a Chicago paper eulogized him as "The Voice of Sanity in Washington" for warning that continuous spending at the present rate would bankrupt the federal treasury and for forecasting that a day of reckoning would come. The editor commented, "Every congressman knows it and yet Senator Robinson has had to brave the fire of his colleagues in demanding that the process be halted." He concluded that Robinson's warning must be heeded if the country would escape ruin.⁵⁵ Robinson was a balanced-budget man at heart. He favored deficit spending only in an emergency when the general welfare of the people was at stake.

By 1937 Robinson felt that the critical period had ended. One of his last comments upon the budget indicated that he had taken an elder statesman's view of spending:

It is hard to make our people conscious of the necessity for retrenchment in public expenditures. Sometimes I get very much discouraged. Thousands of Arkansans come here during the year begging, begging, begging! They sometimes try to lift their process of robbing the Federal Treasury to a high plane by surrounding their projects and plans with a dignity and magnitude that truly are inspiring. It is going to be very difficult to ever get away from this habit of giving out Federal favors. You can not imagine how persistent are the

⁵⁴Robinson to John B. Moore, April 2, 1934, ibid.

⁵⁵Chicago Tribune, editorial, February, 1934, Robinson Clippings.

forces of plunder.⁵⁶

Robinson pointed out that the many measures before Congress would require billions of dollars and that to comply with even a small portion of these demands "would bankrupt the country and tend to centralize all power in the national government,"⁵⁷ or even worse, would stimulate uncontrolled inflation.⁵⁸ He repeated on numerous occasions that the taxing power of the federal government should not be used to reduce fortunes or to redistribute personal wealth. Such exorbitant rates would destroy wealth and produce little revenue.⁵⁹

The President finally abandoned his talk of balancing the budget and reversed his policies. In the first three months of 1937 he demanded additional appropriations for WFA, PWA, FSA, CCC, NYA, USHA, and other agencies in excess of \$3,000,000,000;⁶⁰ and Robinson and other Southern conservatives strongly disapproved. Much concerned, the Majority Leader wrote a friend:

During the last seven and a half years we have operated the government largely on borrowed capital. This practice cannot be pursued indefinitely, and I think

⁵⁶Robinson to W. T. Sitlington, editor of the Arkansas Democrat (Little Rock), July 6, 1937, Robinson Papers.

⁵⁷Robinson to Henry G. Riegler, June 7, 1935, ibid.

⁵⁸Robinson to James J. Harrison, April 19, 1937, ibid.

⁵⁹Robinson to Baruch, October 31, 1934, ibid.

⁶⁰Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 299-300.

should be terminated just as soon as circumstances permit. It is of first importance that the credit of the Treasury be maintained and in order to do that it will be necessary to reject many bills which are proposed for additional expenditures and equally necessary to cut in every reasonable way, appropriations that are in prospect.⁶¹

Finally, in June, 1937, Robinson broke with the administration when it proposed to sponsor a \$1,500,000,000 relief bill. He introduced an amendment which would require local communities, when possible, to put up 25 per cent of the cost of WPA projects, having as the basis for his objections the size of the national debt:

Gentlemen may laugh about a 36-billion-dollar debt hanging over the Treasury if they wish to, but I find it impossible to laugh about such a thing. . . . We spend and we spend and we spend, and there are some who vote for all appropriations and against all taxes. . . . We can't go on forever doing it.⁶²

Though most of the Southern senators supported Robinson, his amendment was rejected by the Senate 34 to 49. Robinson's efforts failed to convert the New Dealers who were insisting on even greater expenditures to promote recovery and instigate reform.

The Roosevelt administration sought cures for its economic predicament not only through domestic legislation but also from an expanded foreign market. After many years

⁶¹Robinson to W. T. Sitlington, April 30, 1937, Robinson Papers.

⁶²Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., June 18, 1937, p. 5955.

of adherence to a high tariff policy which fostered national economic isolationism, Congress passed the Reciprocity Trade Agreements Act in June, 1934,⁶³ which indicated a definite step toward economic cooperation. Secretary Cordell Hull, who had been disappointed by the President's withdrawal of support from the London Conference, in 1933, eventually achieved a lifetime ambition by negotiating 102 reciprocal tariff agreements with 37 nations.⁶⁴

Senator Robinson was in full accord on this matter and saw in it an end to partisan tariff legislation. The Act authorized the President, when advised by an Executive Commission, to make rate changes within certain limitations. Against sharp opposition in the Senate, the Senator defended the act: "This proposed legislation does not contemplate a permanent policy in tariff making different from that which has prevailed throughout the past. The purpose of the pending measure is to revive the failing commerce of the United States. It is not to destroy or to injure agriculture."⁶⁵ With the aid of other southern senators, Robinson was successful in defeating an amendment that would limit the executive power from placing any reciprocal tariff agreement in effect

⁶³Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 114.

⁶⁴Hull, The Memoirs of Cordell Hull, 377.

⁶⁵Cong. Rec., 73 Cong., 2 sess., June 1, 1934, p. 10194.

and the measure was signed on June 12. The Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act marked a step in the direction of international cooperation. A second move which Senator Robinson had long advocated was the consideration of America's entrance into the Permanent Court of International Justice or the World Court.

The question arose in 1932 in the Hoover administration, but at that time Robinson had refused to press the issue because of the urgency of other legislation and fear of a filibuster.⁶⁶ Again in 1932, Robinson had written Newton D. Baker that over one-third of the Senate opposed the ratification of our entrance into the World Court.⁶⁷ However, at that time he blocked consideration of the issue because of the conditions in Europe, the war in the Orient, and the anti-foreign sentiment arising in America over the moratorium of war debts.⁶⁸ Before a meeting of the American Conference on International Justice, in May, 1932, Robinson, in spite of the deferment of action by the Senate, stated his conviction of the necessity for such a court:

Never in history has there been greater necessity for a world-wide reign of law. The progress of justice has been impeded by our failure to join the Court. Our rights may be impaired through proceedings taken without our knowledge and to which we have not had opportunity to object. If we join the court we will be in better position to protect American interests than if we stand

⁶⁶Robinson to John W. Davis, November 10, 1930, Robinson Papers.

⁶⁷Robinson to N. D. Baker, March 23, 1932, ibid.

⁶⁸Robinson to R. E. Jeffery, March 20, 1932, ibid.

aloof.⁶⁹

In January, 1935, the matter of the World Court was again revived when President Roosevelt sent a request to the Senate urging the United States adherence to the Court. Senator Robinson then introduced a resolution at the President's request and made a plea for the World Court on an NBC radio hook-up.

In introducing the resolution before the Senate, the Senator said:

Probably no subject has been so clouded by misunderstanding as the proposal that the United States accept membership in the World Court. The advocates in some instances have claimed more advantages to the American public than reasonably can be expected, while some of the opponents have conjured up in their imagination disastrous results. . . . Admitting that many actually acute differences between nations may not be submitted to the Court for decision, there are still numerous issues arising from time to time which sound policy justifies shall be referred to judicial process for settlement.⁷⁰

Opponents attacked the Court issue with a vengeance. Huey Long's tirade entitled "America for Sale," contended that the policies of the United States were being betrayed by the activities of the Court and of the League itself. Senator Gore spoke passionately against the Court as a creature of the League which was composed of debt-defaulting countries who called Americans "bloodsuckers, hypocrites, and shylocks."

⁶⁹Address before the American Conference on International Justice, May 3, 1932, ibid.

⁷⁰Cong. Rec., 74 Cong., 1 sess., January 15, 1935, p. 437.

Senator Norris called adherence to the World Court a "dangerous step." Among the Senate leaders only Barkley and Connally stood staunchly by Robinson.

Robinson pointed to the impartiality of the sixty decisions rendered by the World Court with only the Austro-German customs case being challenged by the Senate. He protested against the overwhelming prejudice and propaganda that had poured forth across the land, referring to Charles E. Coughlin as one who had "permitted his imagination to run riot."

For twelve long years the Senate leader affirmed, he had presented the issue zealously to the American people; and if any conspiracies existed, they came from misguided leaders. To Robinson there was but one choice:

Now, if we say that we will not accept this agency, that we have no other agency to propose, what is the hope of the mothers of the land? What is the hope of the children of this and coming generations? Must they be born to a heritage of blood and sacrifice? Must they advance into the future realizing that it is far more easy for Government and governmental agencies to drag them into the vortex of a destructive war than it is to lift them to a plane on which they may enjoy peace?

I leave the issue with you.⁷¹

As the voting took place in the Senate, it became apparent that the fifteen uncommitted Senators were voting against the measure and the results of the vote, 52 to 36, revealed a lack of the necessary two-thirds majority. The

⁷¹
Ibid.

galleries cheered. Jubilant Hearstlings hurried to call their boss at San Simeon, California. No less than fifteen senators telephoned congratulations to Father Coughlin.⁷² Robinson had again gone down fighting for a cause in which he earnestly believed: "Half an hour after adjournment the Senate floor was empty except for some charwomen standing hesitantly around the walls and a lone Senator bent over his desk with his head in his arms. Lifting his head with a start, Leader Robinson glanced at the waiting charwomen, gathered up a bundle of papers and trudged wearily out."⁷³

The bitter fight had been launched without the leadership of Senator Key Pittman, who had developed a lukewarm attitude toward his rightful job as chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, and Robinson was compelled to take over the sponsorship. Roosevelt looked unperturbed the day following such a smashing defeat, and some people wondered if he had his heart and soul behind the measure.⁷⁴

Frank H. Simonds analyzed the cause of the defeat as an underestimation of the attitude of the masses who demonstrated a sentiment for nationalism instead of a desire for international cooperation. Yet Simonds expressed to

⁷²Time, Vol. XXIX (February 11, 1937), 15.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Washington Star, February 10, 1935, Robinson Clippings.

Robinson an appreciation for his splendid fight for the cause of peace and commended his "personal and political courage."⁷⁶ In writing to Elihu Root, Roosevelt said that pushing the World Court issue at this time had been a calculated risk and he commented that "Senator Robinson led a courageous and intelligent fight."⁷⁷

The controlling factors that brought about the Court's defeat were summed up by Robinson in an article for the New York Times. Many Americans believed that the World Court was a mere instrument of the League and feared the Court's decisions because a majority of its judges were foreign. Others had the misunderstanding that joining the Court would also mean our entrance into the League. Some felt that the United States would be required to enforce the League's decisions and pictured the use of American troops in foreign lands. A few falsely associated our entrance into the World Court with the cancellation of the war debts. Finally, many Americans had a phobia against entanglement in European affairs and were suspicious of anything "European."⁷⁸ He concluded that it was again the triumph of isolationism over international cooperation. This same point of view was

⁷⁶Roosevelt, F. D. R. His Personal Letters, 1928-1945, I, 450.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, 451.

⁷⁸New York Times, February 3, 1935, Robinson Clippings.

expressed by the Hartford Courant: "Adherence was defeated in the Senate not by appeal to reason but by the exploitation of false patriotism. Vehemence and emotionalism have had their moment of triumph, but those caught by it will some day discover that the United States, for its own prestige and stability, cannot shirk its obligations as a member of a Community of Nations."⁷⁹

The cry of the masses had been too great for the politico-statesmen of the Senate to resist. The United States was resolved now to play only a negative role in the events leading up to World War II.

The Court question was not the only issue of international implication then being considered by Congress. The possibility of our involvement in war was too strong to be ignored. The United States' stand on neutrality was an issue that was just as controversial as the Court question. The aggressive tendencies of Hitler, Mussolini and their military exploits had increased the power of the Senate isolationists. This isolationist strength was reflected when Congress passed the Neutrality Act of 1935. Among other things the law required the President to place an embargo on arms, ammunitions, and implements of war when he found a state of war existing. The application of the act in the case of Italian-Ethopian conflict removed our effectiveness

⁷⁹Hartford Courant, February 1, 1935, ibid.

in checking aggressor nations.

Robinson, a student of international affairs and a frequent visitor to Europe recognized our short-sighted policy. Perhaps his failure to take a stronger stand in support of Roosevelt's foreign policy may have stemmed from the recognition of the futility of getting the Senate to support it.⁸⁰ On January 3, 1936, Senator Pittman introduced the Administration's Neutrality bill which would extend the Presidential discretionary power to embargo "essential war elements" other than direct implements of war. The President further requested the power to determine our degree of un-neutrality among belligerents and to influence directly any conflict without the consent of Congress. These requests Congress refused to include in the 1936 Neutrality Act.

Robinson influenced by Baruch defended the Pittman version of the Neutrality Act before the Senate. He recognized a fundamental difference between "keeping out of war" and being neutral. To announce publicly the withdrawal of naval protection to our Merchant Marine, said Robinson, would be humiliating and would encourage trouble from the aggressors. Robinson's views paralleled those of Roosevelt, but lacked a concrete solution to the neutrality problem:

⁸⁰Robinson voted for the Neutrality Act of 1935. The measure easily passed the Senate 79 to 2. He also gave his support to the Neutrality Act of May, 1937. Cong. Rec., 74 Cong., 1 sess., August 24, 1935, p. 14434.

I am interested in keeping the United States on a course that will enable us to keep our obligations, that will enable us to refrain from going into war and to enforce any national policy from resorting to any other than pacific means to settle our own disputes. . . . We cannot make war impossible by legislation; we cannot prevent other nations from going to war, no matter what statutes we enact; we cannot change international law . . . by passing a statute of the United States. The sensible, the sound, the helpful course to pursue is to do that which is right, to observe the law ourselves and to ask others to do it. We will do everything we can to keep the peace. God help us in that lofty enterprise.⁸¹

At the dedication of the American Legion Hut in Russellville, Arkansas, Robinson stated that the United States had neither the desire nor equipment to engage in war.⁸² He contended that a soft policy would invite trouble rather than avoid it, and that embargoes on basic war materials would violate neutrality and lead us into war.⁸³ Senator Robinson felt confident that the United States would not enforce her will upon any nation but that our hatred of war would not prevent our maintenance of a strong army, navy, and air force.⁸⁴

In the spring of 1937 the Senator was a member of a joint committee to consider the President's request for discretionary powers in placing an embargo on commercial goods

⁸¹Ibid., 74 Cong., 2 sess., February 18, 1936, p. 2291.

⁸²Speech, Russellville, Arkansas, July 31, 1936, Robinson Papers.

⁸³Robinson to Ethel K. Miller, August 15, 1936, ibid.

⁸⁴Address, "International Relations," Henderson State Teachers College, Arkadelphia, Arkansas, August 7, 1936, ibid.

shipped to belligerent nations. Robinson's concern over the possibilities of war was responsible for his reluctant support of the Neutrality Act of 1937, and for the opposition of Senators Vandenberg, Nye, and Johnson of California. The passage of the act in the Senate on April 29 by a vote of 41 to 15 included administrative supporters from the south as well as mid-western senators.⁸⁵ They felt that it would prevent our involvement in war. Yet the strong isolationist sentiment in the United States was not checked until the "cash and carry plan" of selling war material to friendly nations was incorporated in the 1939 act.

During the midst of the political upheaval in western Europe and the Far East, the United States set about electing Roosevelt for a second term. As the campaign year of 1936 approached, the Republican Party found its ranks split, with William Borah leading the left wing and Lester J. Dickinson and Daniel C. Hastings the right. The Republicans were so divided that William A. White had despaired of drawing up a platform, saying, "Not for a thousand dollars would I attempt such a task." Robinson felt sure that the American people would not "discard the New Deal of Roosevelt and turn back to the Old Deal of Hoover."⁸⁶ During the summer of 1935,

⁸⁵Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., April 29, 1937, p. 3962.

⁸⁶Address, "The New Deal Versus the Old Deal," Pittsburgh, May 4, 1935, Robinson Papers.

the Senator singled out Chairman Fletcher of the National Republican committee, Senator Hastings, Senator Long, and Jouett Shouse, President of the Liberty League, as typical of the opposition that sought to discredit the Roosevelt Administration.

Opposition to the New Deal spread after the first two years until some industrialists and capitalists enlisted the support of Alfred E. Smith and formed the American Liberty League in 1934. Smith became the principal spokesman for the group and in January, 1936, opened his attack by demanding that President Roosevelt abandon his "socialistic" trends and return to the Democratic platform of 1932. He compared the Democratic and Socialist platforms plank by plank and asserted that the present administration had turned socialistic. He was disturbed over the rising Federal deficit "which the poor couldn't pay, the rich weren't going to, and the middle class would without knowing it."⁸⁷ Smith labeled the NRA "an octopus that choked the little business man to death," and the AAA an attempt to change the Constitution without consulting the people. He warned the nation against Communism and grimly predicted there could be only one capital, Washington or Moscow. Thus, he made a clean break with his former supporters and became the most influential champion

⁸⁷Address, Alfred E. Smith before the American Liberty League, Mayflower Hotel, Washington, D. C., January 25, 1936, ibid.

for the Liberty League.

Party leaders called on Robinson, Smith's running mate in 1928, to answer these accusations. The Senator built his dramatic rebuttal around a verse in Genesis, "The voice is Jacob's voice but the hands are the hands of Esau." Dropping his usual dignity, Robinson condemned Smith as one who had deserted the Democratic cause for the ranks of wealth and industry. He called Smith's program childish and needled him for swapping his brown derby for a top hat and exchanging his East Side friends for Park Avenue socialites. Using Smith's familiar phrase, "Let's look at the record," the Majority Leader proceeded to examine each charge against the New Deal and to show how the New Yorker had previously upheld the very policy that he now denounced. The Senator commented:

Somehow I think there must be two Al Smiths. One is the happy, carefree fellow behind whom we marched and shouted in 1928, proud of his principles and eager to place him in the White House. Now we have this other Al Smith, this grim-visaged fellow in the high hat and tails, who warns us that we are going straight to Moscow.⁸⁸

He then contended that the directors and officers of the American Liberty League were aligned against Smith in 1928 and supplied Herbert Hoover with campaign funds to denounce the Governor as a communist and a socialist. The Democratic leader deplored Smith's desertion of his old

⁸⁸Address, "The Voice is Jacob's Voice but the Hands are the Hands of Esau," CBS radio, January 28, 1936.

friends with whom he had marched for twenty-five years--such people as Franklin Roosevelt, Robert Wagner, Frances Perkins, and Senator Norris.

With a parting barb, The Democratic solon addressed Smith directly, "I am sure Mr. Hoover was with you in spirit, his cherubic face agleam with his chubby hands applauding ecstatically as you repeated against Mr. Roosevelt the very speech which Mr. Hoover delivered against you in 1928." The Senator closed his address by enumerating the irreconcilable issues that widened the breach between the Democrats and Smith:

Governor Smith . . . you approved NRA; you approved farm relief; you urged Federal spending and public works; you urged Congress to cut red tape and confer power on the Executive; you urged autocratic power for the President; and you exposed with merciless logic the false cry of communism and socialism. The New Deal was your platform as the "happy warrior." The policies of the Liberty League have become your platform as the "unhappy warrior."⁸⁹

Robinson's characterization of Smith as the "unhappy warrior" quickly became his accepted nickname throughout the Democratic party.⁹⁰

The Davenport Democrat praised the Senator's reply to Smith's attack on Roosevelt ". . . as a dignified, masterful address [stating] simple truths [which were in contrast]

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Roosevelt, F. D. R., His Personal Letters, 1928-1945, 599.

to the malicious and unwarranted charges hurled by Smith at the President and the administration."⁹¹ But the Arizona Daily Star took quite the opposite stand:

Senator Joe Robinson's reply to Mr. Smith was one of those typical political speeches filled with picturesque epithets and barbed invectives that are so ably written by Charlie Michelson, publicity director for the Democratic national committee. . . . For a distinguished United States Senator to step down into the gutter and pick up the mud of personal abuse and name calling adds neither to his personal prestige nor that of the cause for which he speaks.⁹²

Party members praised Robinson for his efforts. Senator John L. McClellan voiced his approval, "You deserve the gratitude of every good American for exposing his record and his betrayal of the Democratic Party. . . ."⁹³ Attorney-General Homer Cummings also expressed the party's appreciation by saying, "You have rendered our party an unforgettable service at a critical time."⁹⁴

The Democratic leader received over 6,000 telegrams and letters approving his speech,⁹⁵ but the reply most anxiously anticipated was that of Al Smith who released the

⁹¹Davenport Democrat (Iowa), January 29, 1936, Robinson Clippings.

⁹²Tucson Daily Star, January 30, 1936, ibid.

⁹³McClellan to Robinson, January 29, 1936, Robinson Papers.

⁹⁴Cummings to Robinson, January 29, 1936, ibid.

⁹⁵Robinson to Homer M. Adkins, February 20, 1936, ibid.

following statement to the press:

Poor Joe--I am sorry for him. They put him on a tough spot. He did the best he knew how . . . but there is only one man who should try to answer me. . . . No, I won't make any reply to what Senator Robinson said. . . . I was an Unhappy Warrior to hear him read off his speech, over which he stumbled so that I felt sure it was canned and did not come from the heart of the Joe Robinson that I have known.⁹⁶

It was a foregone conclusion that Roosevelt and Garner would be renominated by the Democrats. The Democratic convention met at Philadelphia, June 23-27, with Alben W. Barkley as temporary chairman and Joe T. Robinson as permanent chairman. The latter had previously served as permanent chairman at the conventions of 1920 and 1928 and was recognized as an excellent parliamentarian.⁹⁷

Keynoter Barkley and Chairman Robinson gave similar speeches describing depression conditions during the Hoover administration and the nation's restoration under Roosevelt. Harold Ickes felt that the Arkansan was "almost purely defensive" in his delivery, but his opinion is not justified by a careful reading of the speech.⁹⁸ Both speakers praised the administration for providing relief through FERA, CCC, CWA, and WPA. The United States currency was designated the

⁹⁶Washington Evening Star, January 29, 1936, Robinson Clippings.

⁹⁷Fay Williams, "Mister Chairman," Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 22, 1956.

⁹⁸Harold L. Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes (New York, 1953), I, 623.

"soundest and the best in all the World."⁹⁹ Robinson advocated a balanced budget, and he stated that certain Supreme Court decisions had slowed national recovery.

The Republican platform in Robinson's opinion was indefinite on national defense, but the Democratic platform supported a navy increased to London Treaty strength, in addition to a well-trained and efficient army. The Hoover moratorium was an international blunder, Robinson declared, and the Harding-Coolidge-Hoover administrations had all fostered the development of trusts and combinations. The Democrats sought to protect small business against such monopolies.

Answering critics of the President, he said: "Opponents sometimes denounce President Roosevelt as a dictator. . . . If he has been given extraordinary authority, it is because the Congress trusted him and regarded him as the best agent it could find."¹⁰⁰ As a political leader, the Arkansas Senator sounded the call to arms and encouraged his party to close ranks behind its candidate:

On our record of pledges honestly redeemed, or services faithfully performed, and under as gallant a leadership as ever raised a political banner, we advance to the battle of 1936 confident that the voters of the Nation will not turn back to the defeated and disheartened leadership which abandoned them when the need for service,

⁹⁹Oliver A. Quayle, Jr. (compl.), Official Report of the Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1936 (N. P., 1936), 87.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 94.

loyalty, and courage was the greatest ever known.¹⁰¹ Roosevelt and Garner were nominated unanimously and the convention adjourned June 27. At the notification ceremonies that night, James A. Farley introduced the Senate Leader as a great Democrat, a great statesman, and a great American. Robinson then in turn notified the President of his unanimous selection as the party leader of the Democrats.¹⁰²

Before the fall campaign began, the President accepted an invitation from Robinson to attend the Arkansas Centennial. After visiting Hot Springs, on June 10, 1936, Roosevelt spoke in Little Rock at the state fair grounds and praised the Arkansan's able leadership. The President's visit was well timed, for the Senator's campaign for re-election was under way. Cleveland Holland, an advocate of the Townsend old age pension plan, and Bill Denman, a former law partner of Huey P. Long, opposed him. Both opponents had counted upon the active support of Huey P. Long, but Long died before the campaign actually began.

Senator Robinson conducted a limited campaign in the state and left most of the details to his campaign managers. He made only seventeen speeches which dealt with topics such as the New Deal program and neutrality in regard to the invasion of Ethiopia and China. Again he carried every county

¹⁰²Ibid., 338.

¹⁰³Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 30, 1936.

in the State Democratic primary.¹⁰³ The Senator's victory was due to his own popularity and political organization, but newspapers interpreted it as a smashing triumph for the Roosevelt Administration. The President sent congratulations: "Your election has, of course, given me great happiness and especially the fact that for the coming four years we shall be together in Washington."¹⁰⁴

The Senate Leader more than once seemed tired of politics. Even before the 1936 campaign began he expressed this sentiment to Baruch:

Sometimes I wonder if it is not a form of pride or vanity that prompts a man like myself to continue in a political career when they might find a measure of rest and recreation by terminating it. Always when one thinks of doing so he is put under pressure by friends who are the beneficiaries actual or prospective of his political activity. Then, too, he is often faced with the embarrassment that some enemies would say he lost courage and etc.¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, when the national campaign of 1936 opened Robinson participated actively and spoke to large audiences in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri.¹⁰⁶ The overwhelming electoral vote surprised the President and the party leaders. Robinson believed that the tremendous vote was a personal tribute to

¹⁰³Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), August 30, 1936.

¹⁰⁴Roosevelt to Robinson, November 21, 1936, Robinson Papers.

¹⁰⁵Robinson to Baruch, April 27, 1935, ibid.

¹⁰⁶Robinson to Forbes Morgan, Democratic National Committee, October 26, 1936, ibid.

Roosevelt.¹⁰⁷

The inaugural ceremonies were held on January 20, 1937, a day of driving rain. The Robinsons rode down Pennsylvania with the Roosevelts. Honoring Garner's request, the Majority Leader administered the oath of office to the Vice-President; and thus for the first time in history, the Vice-President was publicly inaugurated. Roosevelt then took the oath of office.

After the inaugural speech, the President insisted upon returning to the White House in an open car, and he and his wife were both wet through and through. The Senate Leader cautioned the President about exposing himself under such conditions, but Roosevelt answered, "Joe, I can take it if they can."¹⁰⁸ The Robinsons had lunch at the White House, then stood on the reviewing stand with the Roosevelts. The President's appearance in the rain pleased the crowd.¹⁰⁹

Robinson's relations with the President were generally cordial and friendly. He did not kow-tow to Roosevelt and often spoke openly and bluntly, even in the presence of other party leaders. Roosevelt showed respect for the Senator's point of view though the two did not always agree.

¹⁰⁷Robinson to Ambassador George S. Messersmith, November 17, 1936, ibid.

¹⁰⁸Robinson to Grady Miller, January 23, 1937, ibid.

¹⁰⁹Robinson to Sallie R. Scott, January 21, 1937, ibid.

The Arkansan was not worried over patronage problems because his position at home was secure, but he wanted his proportionate share among the appointments. Usually, he was well treated, but he found difficulty in securing favors in the Social Security Administration, in Secretary Ickes' Work Progress Administration, and in Harry Hopkins' PWA.¹¹⁰ Robinson vividly described the extreme pressure placed upon Congressmen from political job seekers:

The main problem is to consider the demands of the thousands who are seeking positions with the Federal Government. They advance single file, in double columns, in platoons, brigades, regiments, corps, and divisions. They sing and pray; they laugh and shout; they whine and curse. . . . It is simply impossible to make a showing of efficiency. . . . I am looking for some plan to systematize the methods of dealing with those problems. . . . which is my principal responsibility and which I would like to avoid neglecting. But why bore you with this jeremiad!¹¹¹

The New Deal program had experienced fairly smooth sailing during Roosevelt's first term, but early in the second administration signs of revolt appeared. A group of liberals, including Donald Richberg, Tom Corcoran, Harold Ickes, Harry Hopkins, and Felix Frankfurter believed that the New Deal was not moving as fast as it should. On the other hand, Southerners who had "gone along" against their conservative instincts now decided that they must block the road down which Roosevelt and his young "Brain Trusters" were

¹¹⁰Robinson to Roosevelt, October 1, 1936, ibid.

¹¹¹Robinson to Baruch, June 26, 1935, ibid.

taking the country. Soon after the election, in the spring of 1937, much of the South revolted and the New Deal machine slipped back into low gear.¹¹²

¹¹²John Chamberlain, The American Stakes (New York, 1940), 93. The second AAA and the Fair Standards Act of June 25, 1938, were the last major enactments of the Second New Deal, Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 305.

CHAPTER XII

ROBINSON AND THE SUPREME COURT ISSUE

The last major political fight for Robinson developed under Roosevelt's attempt to increase the membership of the Supreme Court. The President wanted to appoint men who would reflect the New Deal philosophy and insure a reversal of the tendency to declare New Deal legislation unconstitutional. Until the October session of 1936, only two of thirteen decisions had been favorable to the New Deal.¹

After the court's invalidation of the Railroad Retirement Act, the first Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act, and NRA, Roosevelt developed a personal bitterness toward the court. He coined the famous "horse-and-buggy" phrase to show his displeasure.

In the fall of 1935 James A. Farley and Attorney-General Homer Cummings with the President's blessing were weakening the public's belief in the infallibility of the Supreme Court through their speaking tours and press comments. Differences between executive and judicial depart-

¹New York Times, May 30, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

ments reached an apex when the usual social visit to the White House by the members of the court was discontinued.² Presidential Advisor Tom Corcoran and other Brain Trusters were busy devising schemes to limit the power of the court.³ When Roosevelt was accused during the campaign of 1936 of desiring to pack the court, Senator Ashurst, the Democratic chairman of the Judiciary Committee said, "A more ridiculous, absurd, and unjust criticism of the President was never made."⁴ "Court-packing," he added, "is a prelude to tyranny."⁵

The overwhelming Democratic victory in 1936 gave Roosevelt confidence that he could count on unlimited support from the people. He then determined to change the Supreme Court personnel. The court-packing plan developed by Tom Corcoran and Ben Cohen and previously proposed by Associate Justice McReynolds, Attorney-General in Wilson's cabinet, provided that when a justice refused to retire, a substitute could be appointed. Originally, the suggestion was to apply only to the lower federal courts, but Justice McReynolds,

²Robert Sherwood, Roosevelt and Hopkins (New York, 1948), 94.

³Raymond Moley, After Seven Years, 357.

⁴Merlo J. Pusey, The Supreme Court Crisis (New York, 1937), 67.

⁵Merlo J. Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes (New York, 1951), II, 750.

now one of the most reactionary Supreme Court members, was confronted in this rather ironical situation with a proposal similar to his own.⁶

Roosevelt had secretly enlisted the aid of Attorney-General Homer Cummings to work out a strategic attack, and Cummings felt sure he had the right approach.⁷ He wrote the President that delay in the administration of justice was "the outstanding defect of our Federal Judicial system."⁸ Without consulting his congressional leaders, Roosevelt summoned Robinson, Garner, Bankhead, Ashurst, and Representative Hatton Summers to the White House and disclosed his "bomb-shell." On this occasion he did not ask them; he told them.⁹ Garner was strangely silent. Robinson predicted the passage of the bill although he gave his head a "mournful shake" towards Charles Michelson, the New-Deal ghost writer, as he left the White House.¹⁰

⁶Betsy Ross, "Joseph T. Robinson and the Court Fight of 1937" (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Maryland, 1950), 26.

⁷Joseph Alsop and Turner Catledge, The 168 Days (New York, 1938), 54-55.

⁸House of Representatives, Document No. 142, 75 Cong., 1 sess., Washington, D. C., Government Printing Office, 1937, p. 2.

⁹Moley, After Seven Years, 361.

¹⁰Charles Michelson, The Ghost Talks (New York, 1944), 169.

A few minutes later, newsmen were summoned to the White House office. The President, in "the most jubilant press conference he ever had," released his Court Reform plan.¹¹ Mark Sullivan caught the spirit of the occasion when he stated:

Mr. Roosevelt's action about the Supreme Court will be discussed on many a page of newspaper, book and Congressional Record; and for many a year orations will be delivered over it, fierce arguments made about it. All this will provide much illumination and some entertainment. Yet, the millions who will get their information from second-hand recitals and debates or from the printed word--all these will have missed something that was pristine in Mr. Roosevelt's own rendition.¹²

The President's message on the reorganization of the judiciary was sent to Congress on February 5, along with the bill to reorganize the courts. Roosevelt regarded this message as "the most important significant event" of domestic legislation in his administration, "a turning point" in America's modern history.¹³

The bill had four significant parts. The President might appoint a coadjuter when a judge of any Federal Court, who had served for ten years, reached the seventieth birthday, and failed to retire within six months. The act limited the general increase in number of justices to fifty. The

¹¹Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, II, 751.

¹²Mark Sullivan, New York Herald Tribune, February 6, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

¹³Donald Day, Franklin D. Roosevelt's Own Story (Boston, 1951), 281.

Chief Justice might assign extra judges to any circuit court of appeals where a press of business occurred. The Supreme Court might appoint a proctor to watch over the status of litigation, to investigate the need of extra judges and to recommend their assignment to the Chief Justice.¹⁴

Although the Senators were stunned at first by the plan, opposition led by Borah, Glass, Byrd, Wheeler, and Burke began to form immediately. The first reaction ran all the way from "I am for it 100 per cent" by Senator Joseph Guffey, to "I am unalterably opposed" by Senator Peter Gerry.¹⁵ Hoover assailed the President's action on the premise that it implied the "subordination of the court to the personal power of the Executive."¹⁶ A front page editorial in the Herald Tribune stated that the enactment of the President's proposal would end the American state as it had always existed. This measure struck at the roots of equality of the three branches and centralized control of the judicial and executive branches in President Roosevelt. Behind the polite request for fifty new judgeships to speed up justice was the brutal fact that Roosevelt would pack the Supreme Court with six new justices of his own choosing. "These petty failings of the minor courts," remarked the newsman, "are the pretense, the

¹⁴Alsop and Catledge, The 168 Days, 54-55.

¹⁵New York Times, February 6, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

¹⁶New York Herald Tribune, February 6, 1937, ibid.

smoke screen, under which the President asks Congress to deliver to him control of the Supreme Court and with it the right to rewrite the Constitution as he and his compliant Congress choose." Then the editor concluded, no previous president had sought such a grant of power as Roosevelt demanded so "calmly and artfully."¹⁷

President Roosevelt took active command of his forces, and decided that the bill should first be taken up in the Senate. He asked Robinson to mobilize the Senate vote to carry the measure. The rest of the leadership was chosen, not from the usual congressional leaders, but from within the inner circle of the White House.¹⁸

Hugh S. Johnson as spokesman for the administration denied the charge that the President's reorganization of the court would be the death of the Constitution. He approved Roosevelt's plan to appoint liberal judges and saw nothing wrong in changing the complexion of the reactionary court. He closed his address by saying, "All this hullabaloo is a tempest in a tea pot. It is the anguished beatings of the Old Deal tomtoms by gentlemen who didn't want to see the President elected. . . ."¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Alsop and Catledge, The 168 Days, 81.

¹⁹Address, Hugh S. Johnson, February 7, 1937, Robinson Papers.

Newspaper editors expressed themselves more freely than upon previous New Deal measures and reflected many shades of opinion. The New York Times questioned the advisability of increasing the membership of the Supreme Court, citing the poor selection of a few district judges in Roosevelt's first term, many of whom had been recommended by party leaders.²⁰ The New York Daily News termed the message historic, saying, "No such sweeping reform of the courts had been called for by a previous President, though other Presidents, notably Jackson and Grant, have had their historic tilts with the Supreme Court."²¹ The New York Times later commented that proposing a constitutional amendment would obviate the need of solving "a great constitutional question by resorting to political cleverness."²² The Brooklyn Eagle expressed its opposition:

Already possessing far more power than any peace-time President has ever had, with an unprecedented control over both Houses of Congress, the President has asked for power over the judiciary. This is too much power for any man to hold in a country that still calls itself a democracy.²³

The New York American looked upon the program as the death-knell for democracy and the acceptance of a dictatorship by

²⁰New York Times, February 8, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

²¹New York Daily News, quoted in U. S. News, February 15, 1937, p. 10, ibid.

²²New York Times, February 14, 1937, ibid.

²³New York Herald Tribune and Brooklyn Eagle quoted New York Times, February 6, 1937, ibid.

the United States.²⁴ The leading newspapers of Arkansas either opposed or were lukewarm to the Supreme Court proposal. The Arkansas Bar Association went on record as opposing the bill.²⁵

Some publications, of course, approved the bill. The Philadelphia Record recognized the measure as the unpacking of a Republican Supreme Court, and had no doubt of its constitutionality.²⁶ The editors of the Christian Century recognized the measure as an orderly, constitutional process to facilitate the New Deal program and ridiculed the ". . . sacrosanctity of the Supreme Court as a fiction fostered by privileged interests . . . opposed to any and all change. . . . They demanded that decisions such as those rendered in the NRA, AAA, Guffey coal, and New York minimum wage cases be stopped and that . . . the government have power to perform the tasks demanded by present conditions."²⁷ The New Republic looked upon the court's invalidation of an increasing number of progressive measures involving social or economic issues as a reflection of individual views of

²⁴Press Intelligence, Bulletin No. 1021, February 10, 1937, p. 79.

²⁵Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 25, 1937.

²⁶Press Intelligence, Bulletin No. 1021, February 10, 1937, p. 79.

²⁷The Christian Century, Vol. I (February 17, 1937), 206-08.

the justices, conditioned by their traditions, environments, and prejudices.²⁸

Many prominent writers such as David Lawrence, Raymond Moley, Constantine Brown, and Dorothy Thompson expressed extreme disapproval of the court bill. Walter Lippman strongly opposed the President's plan: "Its audacity is without parallel in American history. For while other presidents have quarreled with the court, no president has ever dreamed of asking for the personal power to remake the court to suit himself."²⁹

Robinson considered these writers propagandists attempting to stir up resentment against the President. He pointed out that these same people who had opposed Roosevelt's re-election now opposed the Court Plan.³⁰ Governor Philip LaFollette of Wisconsin came out in support of Roosevelt and in opposition to the Court's previous decisions.³¹

The Majority Leader was not happy with the situation. He and his staff spent a tremendous number of hours in research for evidence. Apparently he questioned the propriety

²⁸The New Republic, Vol. I (February 17, 1937), 31-32.

²⁹Walter Lippman, "Today and Tomorrow," Arkansas Democrat, February 10, 1937.

³⁰Robinson to Beloit Taylor, March 8, 1937, Robinson Papers.

³¹Washington Post, February 28, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

and the method of reform. This measure alienated many of his friends who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him during the past four years in the Senate. In a letter to a friend, he explained his dilemma: "The President would have done well to have advised more frankly with his friends before precipitating this issue. In the failure to do so, some believe that he made a mistake. My task is to meet the situation as it is. I am trying to work it out fairly and with due regard to every right and interest involved."³²

An informal poll in February showed that twenty-two senators opposed the bill, nineteen favored it, and thirty-six were undecided.³³ A tally of the Judiciary Committee showed that seven opposed, five favored, and six were non-committal.³⁴ The issue became so intense that George Gallup took a poll which indicated that the nation decidedly opposed the President's efforts to revamp the Supreme Court.³⁵ A cross-section of 175,000 lawyers throughout the country revealed that seventy-seven per cent opposed the changing of the court. The Old South and Oklahoma favored the change,

³²Robinson to Horace Chamberlin, March 2, 1937, Robinson Papers.

³³New York Times, February 11, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

³⁴Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 11, 1937.

³⁵New York Times, February 11, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

fifty-two per cent to forty-eight per cent.³⁶

The administration displayed surprising weaknesses--apathy in the Democratic ranks, the loss of encouragement from the liberal senators, and above all the overconfidence of the President. The opposition developed amazing strength in effecting an organization composed of conservatives and liberals of both parties. Also, the opposition re-enforced itself by delegating the Democratic-liberal Senator Burton K. Wheeler to act as a secret liaison to the Supreme Court members who maintained a strict silence throughout the fight.

Faced with a rising tide of criticism, Roosevelt dropped his air of superb confidence and made an appealing speech on March 4 for the support of his Supreme Court bill which would revise the court that had declared unconstitutional several of his measures relating to agriculture, labor, and industry. He followed this fighting message with a fire-side chat on March 9, at which time he stated that this bill provided for the unpacking of the court by appointing liberals, not puppets of personal choice.

The response to the speeches was so poor, and the opposition was gaining strength so steadily that Roosevelt called Robinson and Garner to the White House. The White House staff reported quite untruthfully that Robinson and Garner, not the President, sought the interview. Piqued

³⁶Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), February 11, 1937.

by this release, Garner left the conference with a feeling of bitterness against the President.³⁷ By the end of March "Harrison, Byrnes, [and] Garner . . . were in opposition [to the President] on labor and spending, and therefore disinclined to give . . . [their support to] the court bill."³⁸

Robinson retreated and mapped out a new plan of strategy. He chose Minton of Ohio, Barkley of Kentucky, Logan of Kentucky, and Black of Alabama as his new lieutenants to help him force the bill through. It soon appeared that the Majority Leader was "Roosevelt's sole ally among the leading Senatorial Conservatives."³⁹ So serious was the situation that the Senate Leader felt compelled to defend the court plan in a radio speech. His address, "The Congress, the Court, and the Constitution," was partly in answer to the stinging epithets of Senator Glass who described supporters of the court bill as "political janizaries," "judicial marionettes," "executive puppets," "amateur experimenters," and "judicial wet nurses," in a radio address entitled "Constitutional Immorality." Senator Glass claimed that "if the President asked Congress to commit suicide tomorrow they'd

³⁷Pettus, "The Senatorial Career of Joseph Taylor Robinson," 170.

³⁸Alsop and Catledge, The 168 Days, 131-32.

³⁹Jay Franklin, "Democratic Suicide, 1937-38," Robinson Clippings.

do it."⁴⁰

Robinson opened his address by asking two questions: Did Congress have the power to enact this Court bill? If Congress had the power, should it be exercised? He reminded his audience that the number of members on the Supreme Court bench had been changed several times by Act of Congress. He also reminded them that Senators Borah and Glass had objected to the appointment of Chief Justice Hughes in 1930. He could find nothing illegal in naming additional justices to the bench, nor could he criticize Roosevelt's desire to change the Court's attitude toward economic and social legislation. He pictured Roosevelt as one determined to "unpack" the Supreme Court and to restrain the authority of the present judges who were exercising control over public policies.⁴¹

The reception accorded the Senator's address indicated varied opinions. Secretary Ickes wrote, "It was one of the most forceful arguments in support of the President's plan that I have heard."⁴² Homer Cummings called the speech "a splendid piece of work."⁴³ Others were not so charitable. W. H. Weingar reminded Robinson that he missed the point entirely: it was not the plan nor the size of the court the

⁴⁰Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, II, 754.

⁴¹Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., Appendix, A677-80.

⁴²Ickes to Robinson, March 31, 1937, Robinson Papers.

⁴³Homer Cummings to Robinson, March 31, 1937, ibid.

populace feared; but the serious danger lay in the caliber of the men whom Roosevelt would place upon the bench if he were so authorized.⁴⁴ Many threatening letters were turned over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation.⁴⁵ Other writers were critical as this one: "I have just listened to, with interest but amusement, your hoax-visioned harangue on the question of changing the number of the members of the Supreme Court. To sum up your remarks in a single sentence, you said absolutely nothing that bore directly on the point."⁴⁶

A new aspect of the problem presented itself when the Supreme Court in a surprise decision on April 12, upheld four cases relating to the Wagner Act by a 5 to 4 decision.⁴⁷ This later proved to be one of 17 decisions favorable to the New Deal handed down by the Court in that session.

Although Robinson sought a compromise, the President still held out for his original bill; and Robinson accordingly respected his wishes. Roosevelt, however, expressed privately to Ickes his fear that Robinson would agree to a compromise without consulting him. This feeling stemmed from

⁴⁴W. H. Weingar to Robinson, March 31, 1937, ibid.

⁴⁵Interview, Joe T. Robinson, II, England, Arkansas, July 30, 1950.

⁴⁶Siegfreid Johnson to Robinson, n.d., Robinson Papers.

⁴⁷National Labor Relations Board v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, 301 U. S. 1, (1937).

the President's conviction that Robinson had been influenced by the defeatist attitude of Garner.⁴⁸ The President's concern was such that he terminated a deep-sea fishing trip and returned to Washington to exert his personal influence. His action was a severe threat to Robinson's leadership in the Senate.

Still another surprise came when Justice Willis Van Devanter, age 77, a Republican and a member of the Court's conservative block, submitted his resignation to become effective June 1. His decision to retire caused many new disturbances. It touched off a spontaneous movement in the Senate to elevate Robinson to the bench. This was not entirely a new movement, just a revived one. Even in the Hoover Administration, when a vacancy in the Supreme Court had occurred, the Democrats had urged Robinson's appointment.⁴⁹ As early as 1934, Roosevelt told James A. Farley that he would reward the Senate Leader with an appointment in appreciation of the excellent leadership in handling New Deal legislation.⁵⁰ The Chicago Tribune featured a cartoon showing the Arkansan harnessed to a two-wheel cart loaded with the "Supreme Court packing bill;" a carrot labeled "Supreme Court

⁴⁸Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II, 108, 125, 126.

⁴⁹Washington Evening Star, May 20, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

⁵⁰Alsop and Catledge, The 168 Days, 66.

Appointment" was tied to the stick over his head and served as the incentive that caused the Senator to race at top speed.

When Robinson entered the Senate the following day, a group of his colleagues greeted him, to his delight, as "Mr. Justice."⁵¹ He was particularly pleased with the apparent unanimity of sentiment of his associates. He wrote to a friend, "Without a single dissenting view they have expressed themselves as favorable to my succeeding Mr. Justice Van Devanter." He also commented that he would retain complete freedom to do what appeared best "if and when the honor" was offered him. He added, "So far as I have heard, there is no foundation for the press statement that the 'braintrusters' are opposed to my appointment. Many of them are just as enthusiastic about the matter as are the conservative Democrats in the Senate."⁵²

At the White House frustrating complications had arisen. To appoint Robinson, a conservative Arkansas politician of sixty-five for the first vacancy on the court while the President was crusading for younger and more liberal judges, would turn the court fight into a "roaring farce."⁵³

Secretary Ickes voiced the opinion of many:

⁵¹"Court Plan Dead, But Not Buried," The Literary Digest, Vol. CXXIII (May 29, 1937), 3.

⁵²Robinson to Dr. M. F. Dickinson, June 1, 1937, Robinson Papers.

⁵³Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, II, 761.

As floor leader during this Administration, Robinson has not only been faithful but has shown real ability. A conservative by nature and training, he has supported every New Deal Measure. He isn't anything but a conservative at heart. And now it is proposed that he go on the Supreme Court as "new blood" and as exemplifying a "more liberal mind" than the irreconcilables on that Court. It really is an occasion for sardonic laughter and I don't relish the position that the President is in.⁵⁴

Rumors continued to spread that the "brain trust" did not consider Robinson liberal enough for the court vacancy.⁵⁵

Donald R. Richberg was amused over "how the public would react if the first appointment which the President made to increase the progressive quality of the Supreme Court's membership should be a staunch conservative like Senator Robinson."⁵⁶ Roosevelt was in an awkward position. Enemies of the President's Court plan were even more interested in the Robinson appointment than were some of Robinson's friends. The President agreed with Ickes that with only one appointment to make he could not afford to appoint Robinson. He agreed that if he had three or four appointments it would be all right to appoint the Senator "just to even things up."⁵⁷ To

⁵⁴Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II, 145.

⁵⁵Raymond Clapper, "Senate Virtually Commandeers Court Post for Robinson," Washington Daily News, May 21, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

⁵⁶Donald R. Richberg, My Hero (New York, 1954), 224-25.

⁵⁷Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II, 145.

disregard the pledge would produce an explosion in the Senate. Now it seemed imperative to create places for several liberal Justices to balance the inescapable Robinson appointment.⁵⁸

Pat Harrison and James Byrnes called on the President to urge Robinson's appointment. They bluntly told him that no compromise on the court bill was possible unless Robinson's friends were pacified.⁵⁹ The President was irritated because he felt that they came at Robinson's request and were attempting to force his hand. Roosevelt, too, had strings attached to the Robinson appointment. According to Tom Corcoran, he told "Joe" that if "there was to be a bride there must also be bridesmaids--at least four of them." Plainly put, Robinson must get a compromise bill through the Senate to appoint at least four additional judges for those above retirement age.⁶⁰

With Republicans and Democrats joining forces to seek Robinson's appointment, Roosevelt could have secured a compromise on his court issue. However, he determined to hold out for his own court plan and refused to commit himself on the Robinson appointment.⁶¹

⁵⁸Pusey, Charles Evans Hughes, II, 761.

⁵⁹Mickelson, The Ghost Talks, 183.

⁶⁰Ickes, The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes, II, 153.

⁶¹Pettus, "The Senatorial Career of Joseph Taylor Robinson," 181-82.

The Majority Leader became embittered and avoided the White House for a vital period of two weeks during consideration of the bill. He was bewildered and hurt over the violent objection by some of the New Dealers, Liberals, and the "brain-trust," to his appointment. In an interview he stated, "I don't know why they call me a conservative. . . . I have fought for many of the so-called social laws that are on the statute books today."⁶² He reviewed the New Deal legislation which he had revised to make acceptable to Congress and to the general public. He cited his record in securing the passage of the Roosevelt program through the Senate.

The President now realized that even a compromise might be difficult to obtain. He sent James Roosevelt as emissary to summon the Majority Leader to the White House. Robinson replied that the public might interpret such a visit as a bid for the court appointment. James replied that such an attitude was nonsense. After a two-hour night conference, Robinson emerged with the President's permission to make any compromise necessary to save the measure. The President admitted in his press conferences the next day, that he had given Robinson the support needed to extricate the bill. So, according to Farley, "it was Robinson who finally persuaded the President to take a realistic view of the court

⁶²New York Times, July 15, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

battle."⁶³

The long awaited report of the Senate Judiciary Committee recommended the rejection of the Roosevelt court bill as "a needless, futile, and utterly dangerous abandonment of constitutional principle, which meant the undermining of the independence of the courts and set a dangerous precedent."⁶⁴

Facing such a dilemma, Farley lunched with Roosevelt on June 18 and encouraged him to appoint Robinson to the bench. Homer Cummings joined them later and added his approval. Farley added that the Arkansan's appointment would be an excellent way to end the session and "leave a good taste in everyone's mouth."⁶⁵ The President promised to appoint the Senate Leader. The next morning Farley telephoned Robinson and addressed him as "Mr. Justice," told him of the President's promise, and directed him to "sit steady in the boat and not rock it, and all would be well."⁶⁶ Elated over the good news, the Democratic solon relayed it to James Byrnes and Pat Harrison, who were in the office at the time, and expressed his determination to continue vigorously the

⁶³James A. Farley, Jim Farley's Story (New York, 1948), 86-87.

⁶⁴U. S. Congress, Senate Report 711, 75 Cong., 1 sess., 23.

⁶⁵Farley, Jim Farley's Story, 86-87.

⁶⁶Ibid.

court fight.⁶⁷

Late in June, Roosevelt held a three-day "Pow Wow" at the Democratic club on Jefferson's Island in Chesapeake Bay in order to button hole each Democratic Senator and Representative and to plug for the passage of a compromise bill. The Majority Leader was so much encouraged⁶⁸ that he wrote his good friend John Garner, "I have enough votes pledged to pass it (the revised court bill) . . . I think I have the most compact organization ever effected in the Senate. . . . if a filibuster occurs of course, I do not know how long or how well the line will hold. If it were not for Bert Wheeler, the opposition could be pretty well pacified but Wheeler is irreconcilable. I think this is due to his personal antagonism to the President."⁶⁹

⁶⁷Grace Tully repeated the story of Robinson's promised appointment as told by Jim Farley. She said that Robinson was "inherently a conservative" and may have had reservations about the court plan but fought his heart out for it. She intimated that Jack Garner had gone home to Uvalde, Texas, to avoid the possibility of voting against the bill in case of a tie in the Senate. Grace Tully, F. D. R. My Boss (New York, 1949), 224-25. Essentially the same story is repeated by Michelson, The Ghost Talks, 177-81.

⁶⁸Senator Robinson felt so sure then that he would receive the Supreme Court appointment that he asked C. Hamilton Moses, to come to Washington and help Mrs. Robinson find a residence and make the financial arrangements for him. Interview, C. Hamilton Moses, Little Rock, Arkansas, August 8, 1952.

⁶⁹Robinson to John Nance Garner, July 2, 1937, Robinson Papers.

Robinson announced on July 1 that a compromise bill was ready and the next day Senator Logan introduced it.⁷⁰ This substitute provided for the appointment of a coadjutor for each justice past seventy-five years of age, stipulating that no more than one appointment be made during each calendar year. This would permit Roosevelt an appointment as soon as the bill was passed and another at the beginning of 1938.

The Senate Leader moved, after the regular business had been dispensed with, that the court bill become the unfinished business of the day, unless otherwise indicated, and that the legislative day remain July 6 until the measure had been acted upon. He had accepted the challenge of the opposition and was ready to face a showdown. Speaking in defense of the substitute bill he said that there was no justification for an amendment when the same objective could be attained through the proposed legislation. He asserted that no lawyer had raised the question of the legality of the measure.

Senator Burke asked Robinson whether the matter of increasing the membership of the court would be left to the President, if a Supreme Court Justice chose not to retire. His answer was that the method of appointment of additional members beyond nine was one of policy, not one of legal

⁷⁰Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., July 2, 1937, p. 6740.

distinction. Senator Austin asked Robinson if the measure was not worded so that it rather forced the Justice to retire in order to save his dignity. Robinson replied that he hoped it would bring about such a retirement but did not consider the retirement of any justice as a "national calamity." Then the Democratic Leader gave a characteristic discourse on tenure of office:

No lawyer would say that Congress has the power to limit the tenure of a Justice of the Supreme Court to less than life and good behavior, and therefore, no proposal of that nature is presented. But there is, and there has been for more than 50 years, a feeling in the country among those who constitute its citizenship, that a man is not always conscious of his failing powers, and he keeps on running for office, running, running, and running, until everyone gets tired of him and until some man whom he considers his inferior defeats him for office. . . . I have often thought that politics is not an occupation; it is a disease; and, by the Eternal, when it gets in the blood and brain, there is no cure for it.⁷¹

There were many spectators in the galleries who added an extra stimulus to the debate by their cheers and laughter. All present in the Senate witnessed Robinson's "masterful job of presenting the administration's case" as he parried thrust for thrust with the most able of the opposition.⁷² His chief antagonist was Senator Burke. Finally, after a long barrage of questioning, Robinson started to reply, gasped for air, nervously lighted a cigar before he realized

⁷¹Ibid., July 6, 1937, p. 6791.

⁷²Kansas City Star-Times, July 7, 1937, Robinson Clippings.

that smoking was forbidden in the Senate, and turned to Burke, saying, "No more questions today. The Senator may reserve them until next week. Good-bye."⁷³

Everyone present realized that Senator Robinson was a sick man. The struggle had taxed him to the limit. The pressure of forces opposing the bill was overwhelming. Robinson questioned this solution to the Supreme Court problem. He had no doubt concerning the legality of the bill. His doubt lay in the kind of men the President would recommend for appointment. This was really the chief concern of many who opposed the measure.⁷⁴

The continuous questioning day after day by the opposition delayed the debate and prompted Robinson to hold a conference with his lieutenants. They reluctantly decided to tighten the rules. Key Pittman, presiding in Garner's absence, agreed to honor Robinson's wishes. The revival of long forgotten stringent Senate rules, brought the opposition bellowing to their feet. By these rules a senator was allowed to speak only once upon an issue and so tense was the debate that by the adjournment time even Robinson was trembling and purple with rage.⁷⁵

⁷³Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., July 7, 1937, p. 6798.

⁷⁴Interview, Joe T. Robinson, II, England, Arkansas, July, 1950.

⁷⁵Alsop and Catledge, The 168 Days, 258-59.

The Majority Leader never returned to the Senate floor; the legislative struggle had ended for him. On July 14 the maid found him lying dead on the floor of his apartment. His glasses lay nearby, and his hand clutched a copy of the Congressional Record of the previous day. Mrs. Robinson, rarely absent from him, was in Little Rock preparing their home for their return after the adjournment of Congress. The Senator had succumbed to a heart ailment that had been chronic for many years.

On July 14 a change was evident in the Senate. The charged atmosphere of bitterness and tension melted to the calmness of respect for the memory of the late Democratic Leader. Senator Hattie Carraway moved that the long legislative day be ended and that the Senate adjourn out of respect for its late Majority Leader. Barkley stated that "no man ever bore the responsibility of leadership with greater courage, fortitude, patience, foresight, or wisdom." Senator Kenneth McKellar, who occupied the adjoining Senate seat for many years commented, "I never knew a nobler man than Joe Robinson." Senator Pat Harrison, whom Robinson loved dearly, made this sincere tribute: "Joe Robinson was, to my mind, the most useful, the most dynamic, the most forceful, and the most influential man I have ever seen in public life."

He had a heart of gold, yet as tender as the heart of a child." Senator Robert F. Wagner of New York contributed a significant evaluation:

Chosen to be the chief legislative general in the most comprehensive social and economic program ever enacted in this country, his integrity of mind and character and his remarkable talents made every member of the Senate, regardless of party, feel that no one else could have done his work so well as he did it. His masterful accomplishments will long stand as an inspiration to others and as a standard by which unselfish, devoted, and brilliant public service will be judged.⁷⁶

Charles Michelson also paid tribute to Robinson: "Nobody had a clearer perception of the political perils involved. . . . It is not too much to say that he gave his life to the struggle, for his untimely death was practically, if not immediately, the result of the intensity of the effort he made out of loyalty to his chief."⁷⁷

Bascom N. Timmons, a Washington correspondent, recalled that most of the public men in Washington had personal ties of friendship with Robinson. He expressed the opinion of the press gallery who admired the Senator for one dominant characteristic--frankness, "By common consent he was the second ranking news source in Washington--second only to the President of the United States. They saw Robinson time and again in the face of probable political annihilation boldly

⁷⁶Cong. Rec., 75 Cong., 1 sess., July 14, 1937, p. 7154.

⁷⁷Michelson, The Ghost Talks, 166.

take his stand, always with unswerving devotion to principle and the courage of his convictions."⁷⁸

Fred Heiskell of the Arkansas Gazette wrote an editorial that expressed the attitude of the people of Arkansas who for many years had followed Senator Robinson's leadership and political guidance: ". . . the nation has lost one of its real statesmen and Arkansas, one of the greatest political leaders in the history of the state. As a leader of the Democratic party, Senator Robinson's worth was incalculable. . . ."⁷⁹

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who now saw the inevitability of his first major legislative defeat, acknowledged Robinson's effective support by writing this expressive tribute:

In the face of a dispensation so swift in its coming and so tragic in the loss it brings to the Nation, we bow our heads in sorrow. A pillar of strength is gone, a soldier has fallen with face to the battle.

I personally mourn the passing of a greatly loved friend whose fidelity through long years has never wavered. Those who knew Joseph Taylor Robinson best recognized in him the qualities of true liberal thought. Mindful of the needs of the underprivileged, he was devoted always to the improvement of the loss of the masses.

In his going Joe Robinson has left a record as high in achievement as it was faithful in performance. He never temporized with principle nor bargained where the public interest was the issue. But, day by day, through

⁷⁸News release, Bascom N. Timmons, July 14, 1937, Robinson Papers.

⁷⁹Arkansas Gazette (Little Rock), July 15, 1937.

long service in high office, he brought to the national councils the contribution of great learning and sound wisdom--a leadership inspired by courage and guided by consummate common sense and a devotion to duty given without selfish interest.

And so death found him at the last with hope unflinching, with vision undimmed, and with courage unafraid. Of him well may be said: "He has fought a good fight; he has finished his course; he has kept the faith."⁸⁰

The Supreme Court issue was still so explosive after Robinson's death that each side accused the other of political maneuvering during the two-day period preceding the funeral services in the Senate on July 16. Senator Wheeler said that a continuance of the court battle would be fighting the will of God, and Senator Hiram Johnson laid the Majority Leader's death to the President's uncompromising will. Perhaps comments like these spurred Roosevelt to action. He was incensed by Senators Brown of Michigan, Johnson of California, Andrews of Florida, and Gillette of Iowa, who came to the White House and petitioned the President to withdraw the bill.

With political maneuvering for the position of majority leader omnipresent, President Roosevelt added to the tension by writing his "Dear Alben" letter to Barkley on July 15 in which he reviewed the urgency of the Supreme Court bill and indicated that he wanted to continue the fight in Congress.⁸¹

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Alben W. Barkley, That Reminds Me-- (Garden City, New York, 1954), 154-55.

In general, the opposition thought the President was meddling in the selection of a majority leader. Jim Farley described the occasion:

Many congressional faces flushed with anger when the letter was made public because it was felt that the President had taken up politics before the Robinson funeral, while accusing others of not observing a decent mourning period. The President decided against attending the funeral. I considered this decision a grave mistake.⁸²

Robinson's funeral was the fourteenth held in the Senate chambers since the Civil War. A large entourage of Senators and Representatives departed the next day to attend the services in Little Rock. Vice-President Garner joined them there. Reverend H. Bascom Watts conducted the services in the First Methodist Church of Little Rock on July 18, and he eulogized Robinson as an orator from the old school, worthy of comparison to the great triumvirate in American history, Webster, Clay, and Calhoun. Like these Three, Robinson had so often fought his political battles to a final victory or defeat. Robinson was buried in Roselawn Memorial Park.

The congressmen returned to Washington, and on July 21 the Democrats met in caucus, held a secret ballot, and selected Barkley Majority Leader. On July 22, Senator Logan asked for and received unanimous consent to recommit the Supreme Court bill to the Judiciary Committee. The issue

⁸²Farley, Jim Farley's Story, 87.

was thus removed.

The battle for the court bill was virtually ended. After canvassing the members, Vice-President Garner reported to the President that it was a dead issue. Most of the senators who had pledged their vote to Robinson felt after his death that they were no longer honor bound to vote for the measure.

Senator Alben Barkley stated one of the contributing factors to the defeat of the President's Supreme Court bill:

. . . I always have regretted that he dropped the measure on us, his Senate floor leaders, rather precipitously, with hardly any advance consultation to work out a strategic plan for piloting the measure through the Senate. Though he carried the ball loyally, Majority Leader Robinson was somewhat dismayed by the way in which it was tossed to him. In retrospect I doubt that we ever could have passed the Supreme Court reform bill; too many inflammatory and emotional issues were injected into the picture. However, had F. D. R., as the Quarterback, given us the signals in advance of the play, not after he tossed us the ball and expected us to run with it, we might have covered more ground.⁸³

Robinson's sixty-five years had been vigorous and productive--marked by many characteristics that revealed his dynamic personality. He enjoyed smoking, and was often cartooned with a cigar in his mouth. He read widely, usually serious material, but he often borrowed mystery stories from the Library of Congress to read after retiring at night. Being an expert marksman, he was an enthusiastic hunter. He hunted principally in Arkansas, and was Bernard Baruch's

⁸³Barkley, That Reminds Me--, 153.

guest both at Hobcaw Barony in South Carolina and at his estate in Scotland. Baruch called him the most ardent hunter he had ever known.⁸⁴ He loved fishing and pursued it as a favorite means of relaxation. His hawk-like nose was set in a well-rounded freckled face--marked by lines of responsibility. His dress was appropriate for the occasion and neatly tailored to his portly figure. His robustness, his manly assertions, his sincerity and integrity, his love of mankind helped him develop many deep and loyal friendships. He numbered among his close friends such men as Bernard M. Baruch, Owen D. Young, Pat Harrison, General Billy Mitchell, John Nance Garner, Charles G. Dawes, Jesse Jones, Harvey C. Couch, Edward Hines, Will Rogers, Senator Metcalf, and Senator Kendrick.

The Majority Leader was usually dignified in bearing, but at times could be domineering. His physical prowess, his quick and violent temper, his combative spirit made him feared, as well as respected, in the Senate. On several occasions personal encounters such as those between Robert LaFollette, Joe O'Mahoney, and Huey P. Long were diverted by the intervention of friends.

Senator and Mrs. Robinson enjoyed traveling. Most of their trips were taken at the request of the government.

⁸⁴Bernard M. Baruch, My Own Story (New York, 1957), 284. Baruch repeated the famous expression of Robinson in identifying a wild turkey gobbler as "Mr. Secretary Hughes."

They visited nearly every country in the world and were accepted as "Ambassadors of Good Will" everywhere. Basically, Robinson was a religious man who gave generously to the support of the church program, religious education, and charitable organizations. His life-long membership remained with the Concord Methodist Church near Lonoke, though he attended the First Methodist Church in Little Rock while living there. He was a member of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution and the Board of Trustees of Hendrix college, Conway, Arkansas. He held a membership in the Masons, the Woodmen of the World, and the Knights of Pythias, and was a charter member in the Jefferson Islands Club.

The Senator was constantly in demand for memorial addresses. His speeches to the various Confederate reunions were always inspiring and reminiscent. Often asked to speak upon the great Americans, he enjoyed recalling the life of Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln. Of these three, Lincoln was his favorite.

The political phase of his life was governed by party loyalty and harmony. He was effective in setting party policy as Minority Leader; and as Majority Leader he tempered the New Deal measures to facilitate their passage by a reluctant Senate. Living life to the hilt, he plunged into a political battle wholeheartedly to defend a friend, an issue, his record, or his party. His aggressiveness made him a

formidable foe in debate and in party caucus. Always in command of adequate words and with courage to defend an issue, very few habitually challenged his position.

The long continuous years of service made him a familiar figure to Presidents, cabinet members, and even the page-boys. News correspondents admired his courage in expressing himself on controversial issues. He was not subservient to any interest or political group despite the claims of political opponents or commentators. It was natural that large industrialists, educational leaders, farmer and labor leaders, landowners, and civic-minded citizens should gravitate toward him and develop his friendship. Class consciousness was not a part of his makeup for the humblest citizen of the state found an open door and a chance to be heard. Of his political appointees he demanded efficiency and honesty; however, he was criticized for placing so many relatives in political jobs.

The Senator held several Congressional committee positions during his long and vigorous life. He served on the joint committee for inaugural arrangements for March 4, 1933; the committees of Foreign Relations, Territories and Insular Affairs; and was chairman of the powerful Rules Committee. He was appointed to the Constitution Sesquicentennial Commission.

He entered vigorously into political discussions or

issues in Congress. He drew sharp lines between those who supported the party policy and those who did not. When speaking in the Senate, he usually began calmly but while debating or explaining the issue his voice rose, his face flushed, his movements became forceful, and he pounded his fists so that they were heard in the corridors. So conscientiously did he perform his legislative duties that he neither spared his health nor his time and placed the public demands before personal pleasure or comfort.

He was irked by any legislative delays which prevented the legislative machinery from functioning. Never in his thirty-five years in Congress did he participate in or support a filibuster. He frequently supported a move to apply the cloture rule to limit debate upon an issue before the Senate. He had the ability to conform to the changing conditions as is evidenced by his record.

When the "brain trust" and the liberal factions of the Roosevelt administration suggested radical changes, Robinson maneuvered legislation in the tradition of the Congressional conservatives and drafted legislative bills that permitted changes and corrections, and yet met the needs of the nation. He allowed Roosevelt the changes he desired in a program leaning to the left of center by using legislative leaders and committee chairmen inclined to resist any radical change. He conferred with Roosevelt several times a week.

As chairman of the powerful Rules committee, he controlled the consideration of legislation in the Senate and was successful in expediting many New Deal measures through the Senate. In his first term in the Arkansas legislature in 1895, he supported measures that called for control of public transportation and other reforms advocated by the Populist movement. During his ten years in the United States House of Representatives he stood for control of trusts, aids to agriculture, regulation of railroads, and conservation of public lands and natural resources. He aided in drafting legislation to promote the welfare of the Indians and the inspection of locomotives. Robinson also contributed to the reorganization of the Interstate Commerce Commission, and the establishment of the Federal Trade Commission. He helped draft the child labor law and the Esch-Cummins Transportation Act of 1920, and was the co-author of the Robinson-Patman Act.

Senator Robinson's defense of the League of Nations, his foresight in seeing the defects of the Four-Power Treaty, his advocacy in arms limitation of naval weapons, his desire to restore good trade relationships with world powers, his support of the London Naval Conference and the London Economic Conference, his peaceful settlement of the Mexican expropriation of foreign property, all contributed greatly in bringing about better relationships with the rest of the

world.

While he forewarned the United States of the ruthlessness and aggressiveness of Japan, Italy, and Germany, action was held in abeyance by the strong isolationist sentiment in the Senate and in the country generally. He did not take a strong position against the weak and defenseless neutrality acts. It was after his death that Roosevelt broke with the liberal isolationists.⁸⁵ Robinson's keen insight recognized the inequities of the protective tariff on agriculture, mining, and industry, and international trade; and he kept the issue alive before the people.

It is difficult to conclude that he should be classified as other than a Southern conservative with liberal tendencies where the needs and welfare of the people were concerned. Certainly he was not a liberal in the style of George Norris, William E. Borah, Robert F. Wagner, or Hiram Johnson. He was less conservative than Pat Harrison, John Nance Garner, F. N. Simmons, Oscar W. Underwood, and Bernard

⁸⁵Roosevelt was confronted with a situation in which the Southern conservatives supported his foreign policy and opposed his domestic legislation. But the Mid-Western liberals supported his New Deal legislation but opposed his foreign policy, vehemently. Roosevelt saw that it would become necessary to curtail his New Deal legislative program in order to secure the South's support of his foreign policy of aiding the democracies by supplying war material. Rauch, The History of the New Deal, 1933-38, 326. For a discussion of neutrality legislation see Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage, Neutrality for the United States (New Haven, 1940), 304-43.

M. Baruch. His views generally were similar to those of Royal S. Copeland, Senator Thomas Walsh, Homer S. Cummings, and Alben W. Barkley. These politicians usually stayed in the middle of the changing political and economic currents. And that is the position Robinson generally occupied--a middle of the road politician--giving support to some issues, blocking legislation in other fields and compromising often in order that the nation would not experience violent reactions in its industrial, agricultural, economic, social and political life. The answer to the question, was he really a liberal or a conservative, will depend largely upon the point of view of the reader and interpreter of this biography. Robinson himself thought he knew the answer. During the controversial Supreme Court issue he replied to a letter in defense of the President's proposal by saying: "I think I am what the public generally terms conservative, although I regard myself as a liberal."⁸⁶

⁸⁶Robinson to n.n., n.d. (Spring, 1937), Robinson Papers.

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