

CONVENTION TIME IN THE U.S.

Washington. So the States say who shall vote in Federal elections. Over half the States have literacy tests; some have property qualifications. The Constitution says that there shall be no discrimination "on account of race, colour, or previous condition of servitude," but several Southern States have adopted qualifications, generally in the form of a poll-tax, which effectively disfranchises a majority of Negro voters and a large proportion of poor white citizens as well. Each year, however, a larger number of Negroes in the South are voting, partly as a result of organised movements to get them to pay their poll taxes and avail themselves of the ballot.

How are the party conventions organised?

The conventions are composed of party delegates from all the States. Each State is allowed twice the number of delegates as its total number of members of Congress. They number about a thousand. But this is not all. A party convention attracts other people from all over the Union, and it is necessary that it be held in a big city which can provide a very large meeting place and accommodate all the visitors.

Haven't what they call primaries something to do with the conventions? What exactly are primaries?

Primaries are elections held in about a third of the States to select party delegates to the National Convention, and at the same time offer party members in the State an opportunity of voting for a possible nominee for the Presidential election. Men intending to offer themselves for the presidential nomination by the National Convention may enter these primaries, but they are not obliged to do so. Primaries provide a preliminary test of the popularity of different candidates who will come before the National Convention. The result of primaries pledges State delegates to certain candidates, but not irrevocably.

How does the Convention proceed?

You must visualise a convention not only as an assembly to choose party can-

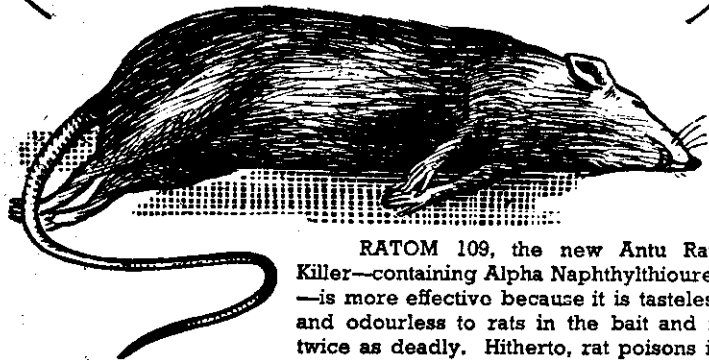


"Party conventions . . . one of the most colourful shows in American politics"

didates for the Presidency and Vice-Presidency and draft the party platform, but as entertainment. "These meetings are tremendously dramatic," says an American textbook, *The American Citizen*. "Packed halls draped in flags, the delegates under their State banners, thousands of spectators begging

to get in, bands playing, speeches, enthusiasm, demonstrations, some of them spontaneous, all add to produce one of the most colourful shows in American politics." An English expositor writes of the convention proceedings as "frenzied." The galleries may hold nearly 20,000 spectators. "The room

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