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Washington News Letter

- Exit Mr. Truman—
- But HST Remains Key—
- Eisenhower Men Smile—
- Kefauver and Russell—
- Stevenson's Chances—
- On To Chicago—

President Harry Truman crossed up the regular group of reporters who cover his press conferences in Washington when he suddenly announced at the Jefferson-Jackson Day dinner in Washington that he would not be a candidate for renomination this year. For months Mr. Truman had been telling the reporters who quizzed him that when he was ready to make an announcement they would be amply warned and given time to get ready for it.

Yet the President didn't let a single soul, other than Mrs. Truman, in on his secret until minutes before he came out with it. Told just before the bomb was thrown was Speaker Sam Rayburn of the House and Texas. Because the President's message was unexpected and came late at night, reporters who normally

would have been on hand to rush the hottest copy in months to home papers were either snoozing or elsewhere or, if on hand, unprepared for what came.

A significant result of the presidential exit, which has gone largely unnoticed in the press, is the fact that the President's decision leaves him no way to control doings at Chicago in July. Had the President remained a possible candidate up to the last minute he would have had great influence. Now, with Truman known to be out of it, eyes turn in other directions. There is no tendency to await a signal from the White House as to support of this or that candidate. The race is wide open—and out of White House control.

It means that the Democratic convention will be a dog-fight, even more so than the Republican nomination show, which has narrowed down to two men. Five candidates stand out: Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, who might gain much by the President's withdrawal; Senator Richard Russell, of Georgia, who now really gets into the race; Senator Bob Kerr, of Oklahoma, who had said he would support the President if he ran, and who is now free to campaign; Vice-President Alben Barkley, who would like to occupy the White House for a few years as a political climax; and Governor Adlai Stevenson, Truman's choice, who might give a hint he will accept the nomination, if offered, after the April 8th Illinois primary.

The fascinating thing about the developing picture is that while Mr. Truman loses influence in his own party by blowing out, he gains in stature among the people, the average voter. Thus his influence on the November election will be great, even

though he is not to be the Democratic candidate. He might even be the key factor in the Democratic party's success or failure. It is the President's intention to campaign hard for the Democratic nominee, whoever he may be.

In all the Democratic racket, Eisenhower men professed to be pleased. They said Mr. Truman's decision to bow out killed the Truman-Taft rivalry and lessened nomination chances of the Ohio Senator. But, of course, this was belittled by Taft men, who claimed that Mr. Republican would profit from the presidential withdrawal.

Eisenhower forces saw in the presidential withdrawal a definite hurdle crossed for the General, who would have had to resign his commission to run against his Commander-in-Chief had Mr. Truman remained in the race. The idea of running against his Commander-in-Chief never did appeal to Ike much anyhow. That is the reason he is not President today—he refused to do it in the Democratic convention in 1948, and let Mr. Truman be renominated when he had the nomination in the palm of his hand.

Senator Estes Kefauver and Senator Russell were both happy with the Truman withdrawal but Kefauver stands to gain more than Russell. The Georgian already had most of the solid South in his camp, put Kefauver was having to get his support the hard way—outside the South from the people themselves. Mr. Truman's

opposition to the Tennessee Senator was cramping him in several states, and his exit makes things a bit easier.


Russell must go to work on non-Southern sections if he is to get enough support to be nominated, and although popular among Democrats of every section—the professionals—the handicap he faces is a prevailing opinion among some people that he cannot win a national election, being a conservative Southerner. Senator Taft has fought the same sort of psychological battle on the G.O.P. side for months. Kefauver seems to have gained more than Russell from the Truman bow-out.

Governor Adlai Stevenson of Illinois is expected to get into the Democratic nomination scrap some time after the 8th. He will have presidential backing and might be the favorite by convention time. However, he will not have a majority of delegates (616) since Kefauver is expected to have several hundred, Russell several hundred and others sizeable blocs. He might have the support of the more liberal Democrats, though, like New York and Illinois party men, and a few more major states could make him a strong man at the convention.

The Democratic convention will be held in merry Chicago, where Stevenson will be on his home territory, and at his best. That might help him. Whatever the result, however, it will probably be the most colorful Democratic convention in over twenty years.

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