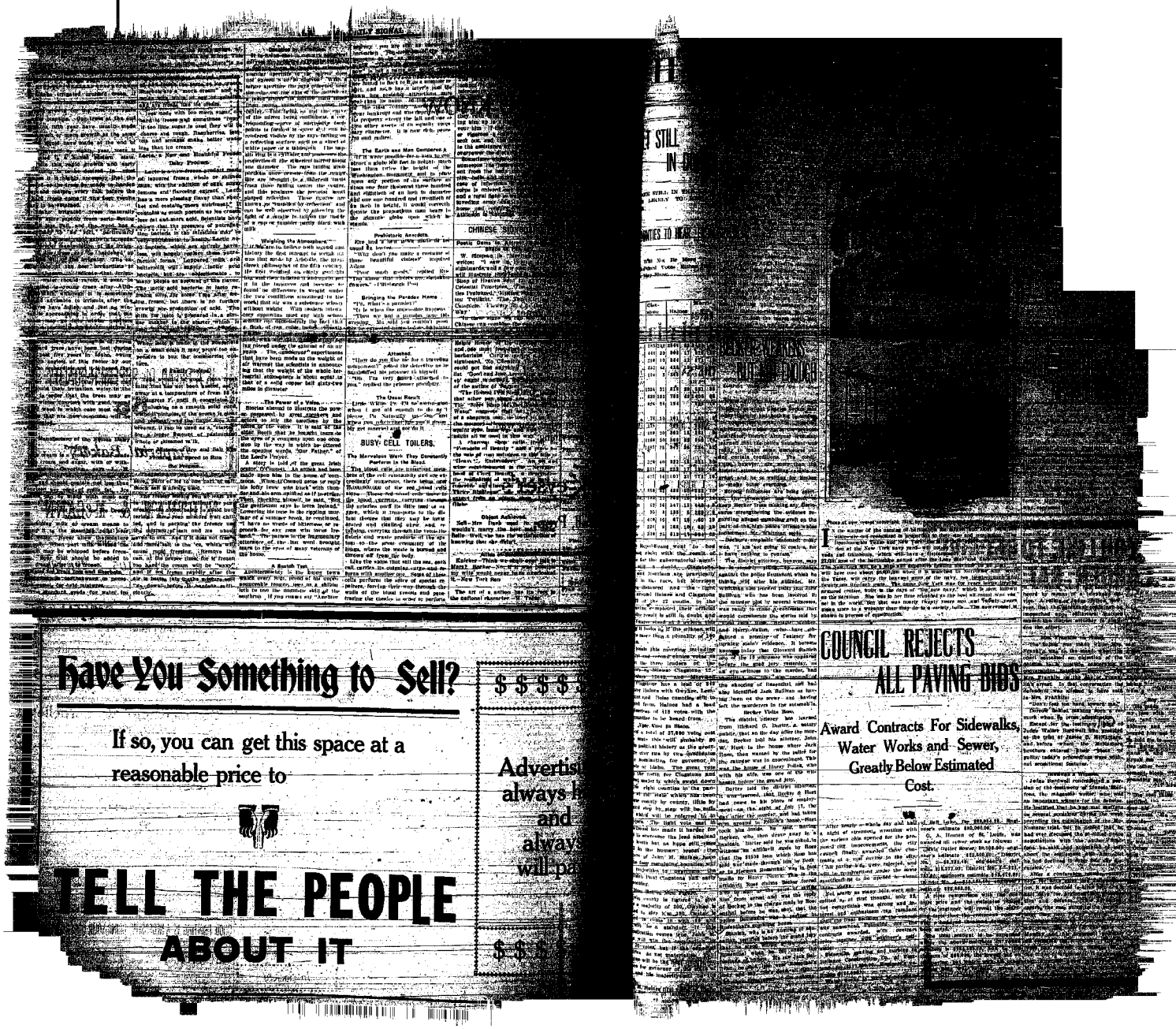
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The Electoral Muddle.

Our politics never was in a prettier mess than now, thanks to this wrangle over the electors between the Taft and Roosevelt factions. Generally we hardly know there is an electoral college. It seems to be like a fiction—or a joke.

...

We hear a rumbling in the region of our electoral college, and we are puzzled to know what to do about it.

The fathers of the republic were wise in their day and generation, but their entire plan for filling the presidency failed—the people having the franchise were to be permitted to elect the legislature; the legislature would choose the wisest available person to act as electors, and they in their wisdom would select the president.

...

Now the political conventions began to nominate candidates for president and the people took from the legislatures and unto themselves the election of the electors. Now the onrushing multitude is insisting upon nominating the candidates as well as choosing the electors.

The Follies of 1787.

The dear old fathers were no more fortunate in the further provision they made as to the presidency. They provided that the candidate for president receiving the second highest vote should be vice-president. In other words that the chief foe and defeated rival of the president should succeed him—if some one would kindly put something in his coffee. That plan lasted a little more than a dozen years, when plain, common sense demanded that it be amended.

The fathers also provided that the president of the senate, in the presence of the senate and house should open the certified electoral votes from the states and that "the votes shall then be counted." In 1876 there were two sets of certificates from several states and the president of the senate alone apparently had the power to say which set should be opened and who should be president. To get around that absurdity we had to improvise the electoral commission outside of all law.

A Pretty Handy Do.

One of the possibilities this year is that no candidate will have a majority in the electoral college. The fathers planned in that contingency that the old house of representatives, elected two years before, should choose a president from among the candidates having electoral votes, the delegation from each state casting one vote. New York as well as Nevada having but a single vote.

...

The electoral congress having failed to elect anyone, however, the senate would have to choose between the two highest candidates for the vice presidency, which should be vice-president and succeed to the presidency. The standpatters and ... have failed for two years to elect even a president pro tem; ...

... provide for the filling of the office only in case of "the removal, death, resignation or inability of both the president and vice-president," and the statute gives first place in the line of succession to the secretary of state. But since the office would be vacant through failure to elect and not by the "removal, death, resignation or inability" of the president and vice president, how could Mr. Philander C. Knox or anyone else get into the White House?

The fathers answer not.

An Unprecedented Snarl.

Without anticipating troubles that may never happen, we are already in a bad enough muddle, such a muddle, indeed, as never was seen before, because since the rise of the convention system, 80 years ago, Mr. Taft is the first nominee of a party to have his title seriously challenged. It is not really a question of fraud—Mr. Taft's nomination is no more fraudulent than Gen. Harrison's was by the vote of southern delegates in 1892.

It is a question of popular rule, which comes up now for the first time only because it is the first time that popular primaries have been held for president.

It all comes down to a straight conflict between the new primary system of nomination and the old convention system and not a personal duel between Mr. Taft and Mr. Roosevelt. This conflict would have taken place under the same circumstances if neither of these men had been candidates before the Chicago convention.

...

In the scramble over party trademarks and emblems the Republican elephant will find itself a bull moose in some states and a hybrid in others, with the dread possibility of being wholly transmogrified into the old Democratic donkey in dress November and turned out to pasture in a thistle field.

In Pennsylvania, where the electors were nominated by the Roosevelt faction before the Chicago convention, Mr. Flinn, the new boss has proposed to run the same electors under the third party as well as under the old party designation.

...

When Is an Elephant a Bull Moose?

...

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