

THE FREE DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION OF 1852

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IN AUGUST, 1852, a New York paper informed its readers that "three hundred open and avowed traitors" were holding a political convention in Pittsburgh. A Philadelphia editor agreed: "In other countries better men have been executed as traitors to their country who did not half so much deserve the name." On the other hand, a Pittsburgh editor prophesied that the convention would be "regarded by future generations somewhat as we now regard that Convention which *first* proclaimed man's inalienable right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'"¹

The object of this mixed editorial opinion was the national convention of the Free Democratic or Free Soil Party which met in Pittsburgh on August 11 and 12, 1852, to draw up a platform and nominate candidates for President and Vice President.² The major parties had met earlier in the summer, when the Democrats had nominated Franklin Pierce and the Whigs had chosen General Scott. On the major political issue of the day—slavery—both parties had declared their support of the Compromise of 1850.

The antislavery group meeting in Pittsburgh marked the fourth time an antislavery third party had entered the field. In 1840 and

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¹*The Daily Pennsylvanian* (Philadelphia), Aug. 14, 1852; the New York *Courier & Enquirer* is quoted there; *Pittsburgh Saturday Visiter* [sic], Aug. 21, 1852 (hereafter cited as *Pgh. Sat. V.*). All newspaper citations hereafter are for 1852.

²The party did not adopt an official nomenclature. In 1848 the third party had generally been called the Free Soil Party in reference to its famous concluding plank demanding "Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men," but the leadership of the party by old Democrats also led to the use of the term Free Democrats in that election. In 1852 the platform repeated the Free Soil plank from 1848; it also referred to the party as "the Democracy of the United States," "American Democracy," "the Free Democratic party," and "the Free Democracy." In the campaign of 1852 Whig papers usually called the third party the Free Democracy, while Democratic journals referred to it as the Free Soil Party. Other terms used were the Independent Democracy and Friends of Freedom. In order to avoid confusion and in keeping with the more or less common usage by historians, this paper will use Free Soil for the 1848 party and Free Democratic for 1852.

1844 the Liberty Party had nominated James G. Birney as its standard-bearer. In 1847 John P. Hale had been nominated by the Liberty Party, but when a group of disgruntled New York Democrats, called Barnburners by their opponents, bolted the party, the Liberty forces had joined with this group and at a convention in Buffalo had nominated Martin Van Buren on the Free Soil ticket. However, by 1852 the Barnburners were back in the regular Democratic organization. "Dix, the Van Burens, David Dudley Field, Tilden, and a host of others . . . were now fighting for Pierce, while Bryant's *Evening Post* and Greeley's *Tribune* cravenly submitted to the shackles of slavery."³

The Compromise of 1850 was apparently accepted in the early '50's by the vast majority of the American people as a satisfactory solution to the slavery controversy. The antislavery party organizations had disappeared or seriously declined in most states by 1851. Except in a few localities they had never been able to elect independent nominees to the national or state legislatures, and now the Whigs and Democrats were largely ignoring their counsels in drawing up tickets.

A great many Northerners, however, could never accept the Fugitive Slave Law, and a devoted few would brook no compromise with slavery. It was plain to them that the bow to expediency in 1848 had been a mistake. Where now were the Barnburners who "had deluded the Free Soilers into supplying a garb of reform for their political revenge upon Polk and Cass?"⁴ The "Workshop Bard" expressed the feelings of the antislavery forces toward their former colleagues in a poem addressed to "Prince" John Van Buren:

Oh, Johnny Van, my jo, John,
 In eighteen forty-eight
 You labored night and day, John,
 To see the party straight;
 But evil counsels triumphed, John,
 And laid your prospects low;
 Then first to beat a wild retreat
 Was Johnny Van, my jo.

³George W. Julian, *Political Recollections, 1840 to 1872* (Chicago, 1884), 125.

⁴Allan Nevins, *Ordeal of the Union* (N. Y., 1947), I, 208. Professor Nevins says this judgment would be "too harsh," but most antislavery men in 1852 would have considered it completely justified.

Oh, Johnny Van, my jo, John,
 How could you stoop so low?
 You've sacrificed the truths, John,
 You preached at Buffalo.
 You're doomed to wear the gyves, John,
 Where 'er they bid you go;
 The haughty South has sealed your mouth,
 Oh Johnny Van, my jo.⁵

The lesson was clear: the antislavery forces must be reorganized and go forth to battle with an honest platform and a true candidate.⁶

In the summer of 1851 an antislavery convention met at Ravenna, Ohio, and called for a national convention of the Friends of Freedom to meet in Cleveland in September. The terminology is important: it was deliberately chosen to avoid offending any antislavery faction. As Dr. Francis J. LeMoyne, the well-known abolitionist from Washington, Pa., later wrote, it was a call to all antislavery voters—Free Soilers, Free Democrats, Liberty League men, and Liberty Party men.⁷ The Cleveland convention of the Friends of Freedom was made up overwhelmingly of residents of the Reserve, although several nationally-known figures

⁵ "To John Van Buren" (second and fifth stanzas), *The National Era* (Washington, D. C.), Aug. 19 (hereafter cited as *Nat. Era*).

⁶ Actually the Free Soil platform in 1848 was acceptable to most Liberty men, but it was obviously far to the left of the ticket. A deal was agreed upon at Buffalo to allow the Barnburners to name the candidate and the Liberty men to write the platform. Theodore Clark Smith, *The Liberty and Free Soil Parties in the Northwest* (N. Y., 1897), 138-142; Albert Bushnell Hart, *Salmon Portland Chase* (N. Y., 1899), 100-101.

⁷ Dr. LeMoyne's letter, *Nat. Era*, July 8, mentions the Ravenna meeting as the prelude to the Cleveland convention. Many years later H. M. Addison claimed that the Cleveland convention resulted from an editorial printed in August, 1851, in a weekly paper he published in Cleveland. "An Episode of Politics," *Magazine of Western History*, IX (1889), 273-274. Smith states the convention was "proposed by Indiana and seconded by the Western Reserve." *Liberty and Free Soil Parties*, 242.

The Liberty League was an "ultra" faction which refused to support the Free Soil ticket in 1848. The League took an extreme antislavery stand and strongly opposed war, tariffs, land monopoly, secret societies, and the liquor traffic. In 1848 the party nominated Gerrit Smith and Elihu Burritt to head its ticket. Other prominent members were William Goodell, who founded the League in 1847, and Lysander Spooner, whose *Unconstitutionality of Slavery* (1845 and various reprints) publicized the views, which were adopted by the League, that slavery was illegal and that the Constitution, properly interpreted, was an antislavery document. W. Randall Waterman, "William Goodell," *Dictionary of American Biography* (N. Y., 1928), VII, 384-385; Broadus Mitchell, "Lysander Spooner," *ibid.*, XVII, 406-407; Octavius B. Frothingham, *Gerrit Smith* (N. Y., 1879), 172-191.

from outside Ohio attended. Because it was believed a more representative group should be called to draw up a national platform and ticket, a committee headed by Samuel Lewis, Congressman from Ohio, was appointed to arrange for another convention in 1852.

With this background it is obvious why Samuel Lewis's call for the convention on June 19, 1852, came as a shock to many of the antislavery leaders. His announcement stated that a convention "consisting of Delegates of the Free Democracy" would meet at Pittsburgh, and called for the "Friends of the principles declared at Buffalo, at the memorable convention of August, 1848," to select delegates. It was signed, "By order of the General Free Soil Committee."⁸

The protests were immediate. Lewis Tappan, who had been appointed to the committee at Cleveland, asserted that there was no such thing as a "General Free Soil Committee," and that the committee which did exist had been appointed to invite Friends of Freedom, not Free Democrats or Free Soilers as such, and certainly not only those who approved the Buffalo platform. He announced that after long correspondence with Lewis over the wording of the announcement, the published result was a complete surprise to him and that he would accept no responsibility for the action of "the Washington gentleman." Dr. LeMoyne was also moved to public protest. He pointed out that he had presided over the Cleveland convention and was certainly in a position to know the duties which had been assigned to Lewis's committee. Many of the delegates, he said, "myself included," at that convention, "were not either Free Democrats or Free Soilers, and under such a call as is now issued would not have attended it, much less taken any prominent part in its proceedings."⁹ However, when the Pittsburgh convention met the next month, Tappan and LeMoyne had been reassured and were prominently in attendance.

Carriages, canal boats, and railroads brought hundreds of antislavery men to Pittsburgh on August 10 and 11. A local news-

⁸ Published in *Nat. Era*, June 24. Lewis later said the announcement was written by Judge Allen, Congressman from Massachusetts. *The Daily Pittsburgh Gazette*, Aug. 11 (hereafter cited as *Pgh. Gaz.*).

⁹ *Nat. Era*, July 8.

paper reported that they all appeared to be orators, who advanced their views whenever they could attract "a small crowd upon a corner, in a hotel or cigar store. . . . The fact is, the members of the Convention have the city for the present, and nothing is to be heard but denunciation of slavery, and eulogies upon 'Free Soil, [Free] Labor and Free men.'" Pittsburgh was not a notable antislavery center, but twenty years of abolitionist agitation had made radical antislavery views commonplace, and there apparently was no public resentment. As another Pittsburgh paper reported at the close of the convention, "The streets and hotels and public Halls were filled with strangers who were permitted by common consent to take possession of our smoky City."¹⁰

There were delegates in Pittsburgh from every free state except California, and from Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and Kentucky. From Ohio came Joshua Giddings, grand old man of the antislavery movement; New York sent Lewis Tappan, another venerable figure, the famous ex-slave, Frederick Douglass, and fiery Gerrit Smith, long champion of a dozen reforms; Massachusetts was represented as usual by an able and aristocratic Adams—Charles Francis—and, with a nice sense of proportion, by Henry Wilson, "the cordwainer of Natick"; the Rev. Owen Lovejoy, brother of the martyred abolitionist, came from Illinois; Pennsylvania's most prominent delegate was Dr. LeMoyne. Conspicuously absent were two of Pennsylvania's outstanding antislavery leaders, Galusha M. Grow and David Wilmot.

The opening session of the convention on Wednesday morning, August 11, found Masonic Hall "so densely crowded that it was impossible for many delegates to obtain seats." Despite "repeated requests to 'outsiders' to vacate the hall," it was impossible to arrange the delegations in an orderly manner. The

¹⁰ *Evening Chronicle* (Pittsburgh), Aug. 11 (hereafter cited as *Pgh. Chron.*); *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 14; *Der Freiheits Freund und Pittsburger Beobachter*, Aug. 13; *The New-York Daily Tribune*, which believed the Whig Party should receive the support of antislavery voters, minimized the crowds and the enthusiasm. It reported that locally there was "but little interest in the Convention," and that two-thirds of the delegates were from Ohio, principally the Reserve, and that the border-state delegations consisted of one delegate from western Virginia, one from Maryland, two from Delaware, and three from Kentucky. Aug. 12, 18 (hereafter cited as *N. Y. Trib.*). This may have been an accurate report on the opening session, but a vote on August 12 showed the size of the border-state delegations to be (in the above order) two, one, three, and four. *Pgh. Gas.*, Aug. 13.

leaders of the convention decided upon an arrangement which might well be considered by modern party leaders: Masonic Hall was turned over to the "mass convention," which was entertained by Frederick Douglass and other speakers, while the business of drawing up a platform and selecting candidates was moved to LaFayette Hall.¹¹

With all the confusion at the opening session, little was accomplished. Samuel Lewis, chairman of the Executive Committee, said that he had not intended to wound the feelings of anyone in the announcement of the convention, and "that none, either Liberty men or Free Soilers should receive the 'cold shoulder' here." Lewis Tappan then explained his objection to the call for the convention and stated that he was now satisfied. Judge Rufus Spaulding of Ohio and S. M. Booth of Wisconsin were named temporary chairman and secretary, respectively. Loud applause interrupted the proceedings when an Ohio delegate came in bearing a large banner proclaiming "No Compromise with the Doughfaces or Slaveholders—Ohio." After the appointment of a Committee on Organization the convention adjourned until twelve o'clock. At the brief noontime meeting at LaFayette Hall a Committee on Resolutions was appointed to draw up a platform, and the convention adjourned until three o'clock.¹²

Henry Wilson of Massachusetts was named Permanent Chairman at the afternoon session. Much of this session was devoted to a discussion of voting methods. Some wished the convention to be conducted as a mass meeting, with each delegate having one vote. Others insisted that this was unreasonable and that the vote should be based on the electoral votes of the states, the system

¹¹ *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 12; *The Daily Commercial Journal* (Pittsburgh), Aug. 12 (hereafter cited as *Pgh. Comm. Jour.*); *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 12; *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 22. Douglass' speech to the mass convention on August 11 is printed in Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, Vol. II, *Pre-Civil War Decade, 1850-1860* (N. Y., 1950), 206-209. This speech is a good example of the extreme statements of the radical abolitionists. In discussing the Fugitive Slave Law Douglass said he had little hope for its repeal and continued: "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers. A half dozen more dead kidnappers carried down South would cool the ardor of Southern gentlemen, and keep their rapacity in check."

¹² *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 12; *Daily Morning Post* (Pittsburgh), Aug. 12, 13 (hereafter cited as *Pgh. Post*); *Pgh. Comm. Jour.*, Aug. 12; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 12. The banner was carried by H. M. Addison. "An Episode of Politics," *Magazine of Western History*, IX (1899), 273-274.

used in the conventions of the major parties. While the latter method would prevent Pittsburgh and the Reserve from dominating the convention, it would have the disadvantage of giving a handful of border-state delegates a disproportionate influence. A third suggestion, which apparently received little support, was that the vote in the convention be apportioned according to the various states' antislavery votes in previous elections. The problem was referred to a Committee on the Mode of Voting and the convention adjourned for the day.¹³

Meanwhile the mass convention had been meeting at Masonic Hall that afternoon. In the evening Frederick Douglass spoke to "the ladies at Masonic Hall," and a young girl "addressed the multitude from the Theatre steps" on the manner in which English elections were conducted. There was also a "monster meeting at the rear of the American House."¹⁴

The next morning, Thursday, August 12, the convention assembled at LaFayette Hall at nine o'clock. After a prayer by the Rev. Mr. Lovejoy, Lewis Tappan reported for the Committee on the Mode of Voting. The committee recommended that the delegations vote by states according to their respective electoral votes, but that the delegations should not be bound by the unit rule. Judge Spaulding objected to the recommendation and moved that the report be tabled. The vote on the motion to table was defeated by a vote of 143 to 179.¹⁵ Greeley's *Tribune* stated that the Eastern and Middle States had joined forces to defeat the Western States on this issue, which was only partially true, and that the vote represented "a test . . . between the friends of Hale and Chase," which was almost wholly untrue.¹⁶

¹³ *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 12; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 12.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 12.

¹⁵ By the terms of the announcement of the convention in June, each state was entitled to a delegation three times the size of its representation in Congress. Apparently Ohio and Pennsylvania were the only states with sufficient delegates in Pittsburgh to meet their quotas. The Pennsylvania state convention, held on August 10, had named three delegates to the national convention from each of the state's 25 congressional districts, making a total of 75—six less than allowed. Thus, Ohio's vote (69) was limited by the terms of the announcement, Pennsylvania's by its own convention, and that of the other states by the number of delegates present. *Nat. Era*, June 24; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13; *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 11, 13.

¹⁶ *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13. It is true that Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Iowa voted 83 to 56 for the motion, but Pennsylvania also cast 57 of its 75 votes in favor of tabling. The only other affirmative

The convention next turned to the platform. The Committee on Resolutions had been unable to agree unanimously and had prepared majority and minority reports.¹⁷ The majority report, presented to the convention by Joshua Giddings, was, of course, largely concerned with slavery, although by no means exclusively so. For example, the report advocated an independent treasury system, the reduction of postal rates, a tariff for revenue only, and federal funds for river and harbor improvements.

The plank on public lands, which appeared wildly radical to some Americans but which—as will be seen—was not radical enough for some of the delegates, stated:

That the public lands of the United States belong to the people, and should not be sold to individuals nor granted to corporations, but should be held as a sacred trust for the benefit of the people, and should be granted in limited quantities, free of cost, to landless settlers.

The growing prejudice against immigrants was attacked with the demand that they receive a “cordial welcome” and that attempts to restrict their becoming citizens or owning land “be resisted with inflexible determination.”

Three planks on foreign affairs advised the recognition of the independence of Hayti; asserted the right of nations to alter or change their governments and held it to be the duty of the United States to use “all proper means” to prevent kings and emperors from intervening against nations seeking to establish republics; and, finally, recommended that all future treaties provide for “decisive arbitration” of international disputes.

Slavery was attacked in a number of planks. The report asserted that the federal government was a limited one, “with no more power to make a slave than to make a king”; it should “relieve

votes were two from New York and one from New Jersey. Thus some case can be made for the *Tribune's* interpretation, but the fact remains that 42% of the affirmative votes were from the Middle States. *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13. The question of Chase's strength will be dealt with in the discussion of the nominations.

¹⁷ The majority and minority reports were printed in the *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 12, *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13, *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13, and various other papers. The final version of the platform may be found in Edward Stanwood, *A History of the Presidency from 1788 to 1897* (rev. ed., N. Y., 1928), I, 253-256.

itself from all responsibility for the existence of slavery" including the extradition of fugitives, and should use "its legitimate and constitutional influence on the side of freedom." Three planks dealt with the hated Compromise of 1850. One denounced the Compromise as being "inconsistent with all the principles and maxims of Democracy," and for emphasis a separate plank attacked the Fugitive Slave Law, denied "its binding force," and demanded its repeal. The third plank attacked "the doctrine that any law is a finality."

Two other slavery planks deserve to be quoted in full in view of the controversy over them on the floor.

4. That the early history of the Government clearly shows the settled policy to have been, not to extend, nationalize and encourage, but to limit, localize and discourage Slavery; and to this policy, which should never have been departed from, the Government ought forthwith to return.

14. That slavery is a sin against God, and a crime against man, the enormity of which no law nor usage can sanction or mitigate, and that Christianity, humanity, and patriotism alike demand its abolition.

The report repeated the famous cry of the election of 1848 for "Free soil, free speech, free labor, and free men!" It tried to quiet those who said the party had no chance and was in the field merely to pull strength from one of the major parties and thus aid the other. The report repudiated both major parties and insisted that "the purpose of the Free Democracy is to take possession of the federal government."

Although the majority report implied that slavery in the states was beyond the province of the federal government, it did not specifically disavow Congressional interference as the Free Soil platform had done four years earlier. Aside from this omission, the report's slavery provisions were repeated from the 1848 document, with the addition of the three planks condemning the Compromise of 1850.

To some of the delegates the report's slavery stand was a disappointment. This was apparent in the minority report of the Committee on Resolutions, which was presented to the convention

by Gerrit Smith immediately after the majority report. The minority report confined its direct remarks on slavery to one plank, but that plank advocated the dynamite-laden argument that slavery was illegal:

That not only do we condemn and trample upon the enactment called the Fugitive Slave Law, and upon every other enactment for Slavery, but we hold all forms of piracy, and especially the most atrocious and adominable one of Slavery to be entirely incapable of legislation.

The minority report wished the party to call itself the Democratic League and hoped Leagues would be formed in other countries to combat tyranny. It paralleled the majority report in demanding a reduction in postal rates, the use of federal funds for river and harbor improvements, and the election of postmasters.

The public lands plank advocated free access to public lands and held "that right to the soil is the right of all men." The report concluded with a temperance plank:

That no civil government which permits dram shops to multiply paupers and madmen, protects its subjects to the extent to which it is bound to protect them.

The eloquent Gerrit Smith opened the debate on the platform.¹⁸ He was in despair "that this superlatively guilty nation" could be saved. He accused the delegates of intending to return to the major parties—"to the old flesh pots of Egypt." Cries of "No, they must come to us!" encouraged him, he said. He warned them that they must leave the old parties—leave Sodom, and not look back as Lot's wife did. He bitterly attacked those who acquiesced in the Fugitive Slave Law and insisted that no action of a legislative body could make slavery legal. He would not even sign a petition for repeal of the law because such an act would imply its legality. "I say it is no law, trample it under foot."

"Would Mr. Smith," asked a voice from the floor, "resist this law with carnal weapons?" A true non-resistant, Smith replied,

¹⁸ The fullest account of the debate on the platform is in the *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13, 14, and 16. The following discussion is based on those issues and on the *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 12, *Pgh. Post*, Aug. 13, and *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13.

was justified in confining his opposition to verbal attacks on the law, but others should use fists, clubs, and swords. Would you hesitate, he asked, denying the possibility of legalizing white slavery? Could you legalize the actions of a sheep-thief by passing a law? Then how can you of a man-thief?

Joshua Giddings rose to reply. Others were not as discouraged as Smith, but he "has lived among New York iniquity, New York villainy, New York sneaking, scheming, and deception, and does not know the feeling of Western people on this subject." Giddings made it plain that he was no non-resistant. In his eyes those who had slain Gorsuch were "the most efficient protectors of our Constitution."¹⁹ He had, he admitted, placed a pistol in the hands of a fugitive slave and told him to use it on his pursuer. But he did not believe that they could demand such resistance from all citizens.

In opposition to Smith's stand on the illegality of slavery, Giddings pointed out that there *were* laws protecting it and he would be glad to work for their repeal. While in Washington, he told the delegates, he had been called on to represent "a young colored woman, who while defending what was dearer to her than life itself," killed a white man. She was sentenced to be hanged but was pardoned on the condition she go to Canada. "Would it have been any consolation to her, if she had gone to the gallows, to tell her that her death was not legal?" What Smith really means is "that the crime of slavery is not diminished by these laws, and that he who holds slaves is just as guilty as though it were not legalized."

Smith replied that he "really" did not mean any such thing. He called his opponents "circular logicians" who accept as a fact the thing they wish to prove—that what they called laws *were* laws. He tried "over and over again . . . to explain the difference between an enactment, which I call no law, and an enactment, which I am willing to call but an unjust law."²⁰

¹⁹ Edward Gorsuch was killed in 1851 by a band of negroes, including the fugitive slave he was pursuing. The U. S. Government tried to convict a Quaker bystander of treason on the astonishing grounds that his refusal to aid Gorsuch constituted "levying war against the United States." Theodore Clark Smith, *Parties and Slavery, 1850-1859* (N. Y., 1906), 24.

²⁰ Smith's statements in this paragraph were not reported in the papers listed in note 18, above. They may be found in a letter he wrote on August 13 to the Liberty Party of Madison County, N. Y., giving an account of the convention. However, he undoubtedly argued on the floor substantially as reported above. His letter is in the *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 28.

At this point the convention adjourned for lunch. General J. H. Paine of Wisconsin opened the afternoon session with a plea for the minority report. He argued that there was no hope for the party unless it repudiated expediency and boldly proclaimed undying resistance to slavery. Giddings, he said, tells us we should not despair, that we are making progress, but since we last met the Fugitive Slave Law has passed. Our ministers approve it and scout the higher law doctrine. We are in a wilderness and have no Moses or Aaron to lead us. At that moment Joshua Giddings returned to the floor, and the delegates applauded when a voice called, "But we have a Joshua!"

Lewis Tappan gained the floor to plead for a compromise. Apparently he had used the adjournment time to contact both factions, for he presented amendments to the majority report that he announced were acceptable to both Smith and Giddings. He proposed that the fourth article (quoted above) which clearly implied the legality of slavery, be deleted, and the fourteenth article (quoted above) be amended to read:

That as American slavery is a sin against God and a crime against man, it is in the highest sense invalid, illegal, not law, either divine or human; and is therefore utterly void and of no force, before God and man.

Tappan's amendment spelled out the impossibility of legalizing slavery even more clearly than did the minority report, but it did not, perhaps, as clearly imply physical resistance to the law as did Smith's call to "trample upon" enactments protecting slavery.

Charles Francis Adams arose to speak for moderation. He favored the majority report but was willing to accept Tappan's proposed compromise if it reconciled Smith's followers. He was particularly concerned that advocacy of violence would check the antislavery movement in the South. Southern delegates were in disagreement on this point. Dr. Snodgrass of Maryland announced that he and other border-state delegates had caucused at the Monongehela House and decided that the majority report was as far as they dared go. He labeled the idea that slavery could not be legalized as "a casuistry," and reminded the delegates that they were regarded as fanatics in the South, where the worst construction would be made of their language. Further debate indi-

cated that two border-state delegates had not attended the caucus. They and one other delegate from a slave state announced they were ready for the minority report's extreme stand.

The Rev. Owen Lovejoy, an uncompromising voice of the Old Testament, took up the opposition to the compromise. He called the substitute proposal nonsense and said they should not make fools of themselves for a few votes. He was tired, he continued, of being catechised by Smith every four years as to whether he had truly renounced the old parties to which he had never belonged. He said some of Smith's proposals had no more relation to the platform than "moonbeams." Adopt the compromise and Smith will be back in 1856 asking you "to go with him on his notion about women and declare them to be men"; later he no doubt will propose more "metaphysical nonsense." Amid frequent interruptions Lovejoy concluded with the assertion that it was ridiculous to say that slavery was "of no force" when it was in fact "of crushing force."

Austin Willey of Maine asserted that the compromise proposal was ambiguous enough to allow anyone to interpret it as he wished, but he believed this was no recommendation and urged its rejection. Professor Finney of Cleveland stated that the minority should yield on "minor points," which must have maddened Smith who believed the question of legality was *the* point of the whole slavery question. Finney agreed with Giddings that the only problem was one of semantics. All agreed, he argued, that slavery is wrong, but if we say it can not be "legalized," we will be understood to assert that it can not be "enacted, sustained and enforced by human government when the fact is it is, had and will be." Do not, he begged the minority, insist on your "'thirty-nine articles' . . . and let the slave bleed on." Emulate the South, which unites to protect slavery.

After this lengthy debate the delegates were ready to vote on Tappan's compromise, which, it will be recalled, provided for the deletion of the majority report's fourth article, which asserted that it had long been the policy of the federal government "to limit, localize and discourage Slavery." This part of the compromise was easily carried, 134 to 76.²¹ Before a vote could be taken on Tap-

²¹ This vote as reported in the *Pgh. Post*, Aug. 13, and *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13, is probably correct, for the total vote of 210 corresponds with the total electoral vote of the 19 states represented. The *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13, reports

pan's second proposal, which substituted an article adopting Smith's views for the original fourteenth article in the majority report, S. M. Booth offered a third version, which largely restored the original article's language and meaning:

That slavery is a sin against God, and a crime against man, which no human enactment or usage can make right; and that Christianity, humanity, and patriotism alike demands its abolition.

This amendment and one which strengthened the majority report by more specifically protesting "the practice of imprisoning colored seamen of other states, while the vessels to which they belong lie in port, and refusing the exercise of the right to bring such cases before the Supreme Court," were approved.

With these two amendments and the deletion of the fourth article the majority report was approved by a vote of 192 to 15.²² The minority report was then tabled, but Smith's followers were somewhat consoled by the addition of a plank advocating their land views:

That all men have a natural right to a portion of the soil; and that, as the use of the soil is indispensable to life, the right of all men to the soil is as sacred as their right to life itself.

Smith believed that the mass of the abolitionists agreed with his views "in spirit and principle." The mass convention, he argued, was more radical than the formal convention, which in turn was ahead of the Committee on Resolutions. The final platform was a disappointment, yet it included "the glorious Resolution in favor of Land Reform," and Tappan's resolution declaring slavery illegal had almost been adopted. Smith reported to his abolitionist constituents that he had not voted for the final platform but that he regarded himself as a member of the party. They need not fear

the total vote as 134-79, but its breakdown by states adds up to 134-73. The vote as reported there was: six New England states, 20-21; three Central states, 48-16; six Western states, 30-34; and four border states, 36-2.

²² The vote is as reported in the *Pgh. Post*, Aug. 13, which stated the negative vote as seven from Virginia, two from Illinois, and six from New York. The *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13, listed the vote as 195-16, with three negative votes from Illinois.

that the party would "break up and disgrace itself, as did the Free Soil Party." Although the 1848 platform was "low," a large part of the party "was far lower. But the Free Democracy is as much higher than its own platform, as that platform is higher than the platform of the Free Soil Party."²³

After the debate on the platform the nominations were an anticlimax. The vast majority of the delegates had come to Pittsburgh determined to name John P. Hale of New Hampshire as their standard-bearer. Hale had served in Congress as a Democrat, until he was read out of the party by Pierce and other Democratic leaders for his antislavery views. In 1846 he had been elected to the Senate by a fusion of independent Democrats, "conscience" Whigs, and Liberty men. The following year he had been nominated for president by the Liberty Party, but when the party joined with the New York Barnburners, Van Buren had received the nomination of the Free Soil Party.

There was almost no opposition to Hale's nomination at the Pittsburgh convention, despite the fact he had written a letter to a New Hampshire delegate stating that he was not a candidate. The letter was not read to the convention, but was well known to all. It had been read to the Pennsylvania convention at Masonic Hall on the morning of August 11 before the national convention convened and had been widely reported in the newspapers. The Pennsylvania convention, which had chosen Hale by acclamation the previous day, did not rescind the nomination.²⁴

Just before the nominations were opened at the national con-

²³ Letter to the Liberty Party of Madison County, Aug. 13, 1852. *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 28. A Liberty Convention was held at Conastota, N. Y., on September 1, with several states represented. The majority report of the Committee on Resolutions, presented by William Goodell, recommended that the group refuse to cooperate with the Free Democratic Party because of its recognition of the legality of slavery and that separate nominations be made. The minority report, presented by Gerrit Smith, called for support of the Free Democratic Party, "hoping that the Free Democracy will purify their platform and become right, after a season." When the convention accepted the minority proposal, Goodell and others seceded and nominated Goodell for president and Charles C. Foot for vice president. However, when Hale and Julian ignored certain test questions put to them by a committee of Liberty men, another Liberty convention met at Syracuse on September 30 and nominated William Goodell and S. M. Bell of Virginia. In November Smith was elected to Congress, where, in the brief period before he resigned, he supported such diverse projects as the acquisition of Cuba and private ownership of post offices and mail routes. *Nat. Era*, Sept. 9; Foner, *Douglass*, II, 550, note 25; Frothingham, *Smith*, 222-224.

²⁴ *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 11; *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 12.

vention a Massachusetts delegate moved that Hale's letter be read to the delegates, but the motion was ruled out of order. A resolution to tender him the nomination officially was also defeated because it was felt that it would make it easier for him to decline. But a candidate could no more refuse a draft in 1852 than in 1952, although the Whig papers hoped that Hale would decline the nomination and the Free Democrats would then nominate Chase.²⁵

Hale was nominated on the first ballot with 192 votes. Sixteen votes (all from New York and Massachusetts) were cast for seven other candidates. Chase, whom the Whig papers were trying to make a candidate, received five, Adams and Smith, three each.²⁶ The Whigs had hoped for the nomination of Chase because they believed he would attract Democratic voters and thus enhance Scott's chances, especially in Ohio. Greeley's *Tribune* warned the Whigs that Hale's nomination "gives us a harder struggle than we had anticipated." It accused "the men who contrived and 'fixed' " Hale's nomination of hoping that enough Whig votes would be thrown away "on the third-party ticket to elect Pierce as Polk was elected in '44."²⁷

Actually it was unthinkable that Chase could have been nominated by the Free Democrats, although he would undoubtedly have secured some support if he had actively sought the nomination. During the summer he wrote that Senators Hale and Sumner were urging him to run, and he was the choice of Dr. Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the influential *National Era*, but, he added, he wished "to be out of the scrape, for many reasons."²⁸

Whatever Chase's wishes may have been, it is impossible to imagine him as the Free Democratic nominee in 1852 in view of

²⁵ *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 14; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 18, 19; *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13.

²⁶ *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 12; *Pgh. Post*, Aug. 13; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13. The last reported only one vote for Adams. The 13 votes of Wisconsin and Maryland were first cast for Charles Durkee of the former state, but were shifted to Hale when his nomination was assured.

²⁷ *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 19, 20. In the election of 1844 the Liberty Party attracted enough votes in New York from Clay to give that state—and thus the presidency—to Polk.

²⁸ Chase to Hamlin, July 19, 1852, "Diary and Correspondence of Salmon P. Chase," *Annual Report* of the American Historical Association for the Year 1902, II, 243; *Nat. Era*, Aug. 19. Chase himself suggested David Wilmot for the nomination in June and Hale in July. Chase to Hamlin, June 28 and July 19, 1852. "Diary and Correspondence," II, 242, 243.

his past "apostasy." In 1849 a deal between Democrats and Free Soilers had resulted in the election of Chase as Senator from Ohio and of two Democrats to state judgeships. Many anti-slavery voters resented not only the deal putting Democrats into office but also believed Giddings had been unfairly bypassed for the senatorship. Two years later Chase had given the antislavery forces of Ohio "a blow between the eyes" when he supported the Democratic candidate against Samuel Lewis, a venerable anti-slavery figure, for governor of Ohio. After the Pittsburgh convention, Chase decided to support the Free Democratic Party, but thousands of antislavery men, especially from the Reserve, believed he was not to be trusted. "He is a Democrat," said the Cleveland *True Democrat*, "and he does not mean to forget it or allow anybody else to forget it. He will allow no conflict between his party position as a Democrat and his conduct as a public man."²⁹

This view had some justification. When Chase learned of the actions of the Pittsburgh convention, he wrote that he would "accept the Platform and support the nominations. . . . But I think I shall not sink my individuality in their organization, which it seems to me, must be temporary."³⁰ Chase's conscience never bothered him; in his own mind he acted with rectitude, following the course which best advanced the antislavery cause. To many slavery men, however, it appeared that Mr. Chase followed the course which best advanced the cause of Mr. Chase. Whatever case may be made for his part in the 1849 "deal" and his opposition to Lewis in 1851, the point is that many Free Democrats looked upon him at best as undependable and at worst as a traitor.

The talk of Chase as the Free Democratic nominee came, as has been noted, from Whigs who believed he would attract Democratic votes and from "practical" antislavery men who knew the Free Democratic Party had no chance of victory and believed the platform and nominations should be made with an eye toward aiding

²⁹ Chase to Hamlin, Aug. 13, 1852, "Diary and Correspondence," II, 244-245; Smith, *Liberty and Free Soil Parties*, 165-175, 239, 240-243, 251-252 (the *True Democrat*, July 14, is quoted there, 251); Hart, *Chase*, 105-112, makes the best case that can be made for the 1849 "deal." Whatever justification Chase may have had, the fact remains that, to use Hart's own words, "At no time in his life was Chase so far separated from his anti-slavery friends as during the two years, 1851 and 1852." 131-132.

³⁰ Chase to Hamlin, Aug. 13, 1852, "Diary and Correspondence," II, 244-245.

Scott over Pierce, for the latter was considered a greater threat to the cause of freedom.

Before the Pittsburgh convention opened on August 11 there were rumors that there would be pressure exerted to control the nominees and platform "with the view of helping or crippling either of the two big parties." We have seen that the platform tried to down these rumors, but they had some basis in fact. A week before the convention opened an argument appeared in the *National Era* calling for the party to nominate candidates representing its principles but also to keep in mind "that they be such as shall bear with the greater pressure against that Party and that Ticket, from the success of which, the greater danger to the cause of Liberty is to be apprehended." It is only common sense, the argument continued, that the delegates "accomplish as much incidental good as possible."³¹

When the convention refused to listen to this advice, which implied the nomination of Chase, the Whig papers accused it of playing the game from the other angle—that is, forcing the nomination of Hale against his wishes and ignoring Chase in order to aid the Democrats. The "Observer" wrote from Pittsburgh that many of the delegates "were full-blooded Pierce and King Loco-Focos," who were strong for Hale because Chase's nomination would give Ohio to Scott. He put the chief blame on Giddings and John C. Vaughn of the Cleveland *True Democrat*. The mass of the delegates, the "Observer" said, were sincere but were unaware of the deals "that transpired behind the curtains, in the green-room, where the wires came to focus, and where business is cut and dried."³²

While it must be admitted that the refusal to allow Hale's letter to be read to the convention was highhanded, the reading of that letter would not have appreciably improved Chase's prospects. The fact was that Chase did not want the nomination and that very few except Whigs wanted him. Lewis Tappan wrote to the *Tribune* that "no plotting, intrigue, or management" had prevented Chase's nomination, and Henry Wilson wrote to Dr. Bailey that

³¹ *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 10; *Nat. Era*, quoted in *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 11.

³² *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 19; letter from "Observer," Pittsburgh, Aug. 13, *ibid.*, Aug. 18. As a matter of fact Giddings believed that Hale's letter made him an unsuitable candidate. Smith, *Liberty and Free Soil Parties*, 249-250.

"Chase was not even considered as a candidate."³³ And finally, the *Tribune's* view that the Eastern and Central States (for Hale) combined to defeat the Western States (and Chase) was thoroughly punctured by the vote on the nominations. All sixteen anti-Hale votes came from New York and Massachusetts, while the West voted unanimously for Hale. To repeat, Chase's candidacy and support were largely vagaries of the imaginations of Horace Greeley and other Whig editors.

After the almost unanimous selection of Hale, the convention chose George W. Julian as his running mate after two ballots. It had generally been supposed that Samuel Lewis of Ohio would be named, and Julian's own state of Indiana cast its vote for Lewis on the first ballot. When that ballot showed 104 for Julian, 83 for Lewis, and 24 for six other candidates, Lewis withdrew his name and praised Julian in a speech on the floor. Lewis later blamed his rejection on the belief of some that Chase and his followers would not support the ticket if Lewis were on it and that Hale might refuse the nomination because of Lewis's "ultra-ism."³⁴

After the nominations the convention adjourned until 8 p.m., when the last session was held at Masonic Hall. At this final session no important business was transacted but the delegates were treated to the spectacle of a Free Democratic convention being advised to support the regular Democratic nominee by a speaker whom the Democratic papers accused of being an emissary of the Whigs!

The speaker was Watson G. Haynes, who had gained some reputation for the part he played in the abolition of flogging in the navy. Haynes read a long list of names of Democratic politicians and newspapers which had supported the Free Soil ticket in 1848 and now were supporting Pierce. He "advanced the rather novel idea that these gentlemen had bolted for the purpose of carrying Freesoil principles into the Democratic ranks." The other theme of his speech was an attack on Catholics and an invitation to support the "great Protestant Democratic Party." The Pittsburgh

³³ Tappan's letter, n.d., *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 21; *Nat. Era*, Aug. 19.

³⁴ *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 13; *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 13; Grace Julian Clark, *George W. Julian* (Indianapolis, 1923), 131-132; Julian, *Political Recollections*, 123-124.

Morning Post, a Democratic paper, said it had reports that Haynes "was a whig emissary, sent out here by Greeley and Seward . . . to give Gen. Pierce an invidious stab." Greeley's *Tribune* vigorously denied the report in an article headed, "A Lie out of the Whole Cloth."³⁵

Probably not one delegate left Pittsburgh at the close of the convention with the slightest hope that the Free Democratic Party would win a single electoral vote. In a sense the party was, as the son of one of the most prominent delegates later said, "little more than a contemptible political fragment."³⁶ Yet if we may take the Pittsburgh newspapers as somewhat representative of Northern public opinion, the basic antislavery ideas of the Pittsburgh delegates were held by a vast number of Northerners in 1852. The average voter probably did not feel so strongly, and he probably agreed with the editor of the *Gazette* that Smith's views were "wild and untenable" and "betray[ed] a mind sadly impaired," but he probably also agreed with the same editor in sympathizing with the aims of the Free Democrats and with their views on the "abstract question of slavery."³⁷

In 1852 Pittsburgh had five daily newspapers.³⁸ In the campaign that year the *Gazette* and *Commercial Journal* supported the Whigs, the *Post* backed the regular Democrats, and the *Dispatch* carried the Free Democratic banner. The *Chronicle* carried no party ticket on its mast, as was the custom at that time, but at the close of the August convention it headed an editorial, "We'll be with You."³⁹ The Free Democrats also had the vigorous support of the weekly *Saturday Visiter*, as its pugnacious editor insisted it be spelled.⁴⁰

³⁵ *Pgh. Post*, Aug. 14, 16; *N. Y. Trib.*, Aug. 18, 21. Haynes' speech is in the *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 14.

³⁶ Charles Francis Adams, *Charles Francis Adams* (N. Y., 1900), 102.

³⁷ *Pgh. Gaz.*, Aug. 14, 18.

³⁸ Typical of the trend in United States journalism, one hundred years later Pittsburgh with a vastly increased population had just three metropolitan dailies, two of which were members of national "chains." Perhaps equally typical was their unanimous support of one party in the election of 1952.

³⁹ *Pgh. Chron.*, Aug. 14. Files of the *Dispatch* were not available to the writer, but its editorial stand was reported in the *National Era*, Aug. 26.

⁴⁰ This fascinating paper was edited by Mrs. Jane Grey Swisshelm, who rivaled Greeley in supporting reforms and fads. Mrs. Swisshelm was given a special seat among the officers of the convention and was perhaps the first

In view of the Free Democratic popular vote in 1852—less than five per cent of the total—it would be absurd to suggest that the support of the Free Democratic Party by two of the five Pittsburgh dailies was in anyway mathematically indicative of the political affiliations of Northern voters. But it is suggested that support of the party by two dailies and the absence of criticism by the other three after the editors had heard at first hand the radical views expressed at the convention, was an indication that the basic antislavery views of the party had at least the sympathetic understanding of vast numbers of Whigs and Democrats and the support of no small number in both parties.

It is not the province of this article to discuss the campaign and election of 1852 in detail. In November the Democrats secured 254 electoral votes to 42 for the Whigs and none for the Free Democrats.⁴¹ In the popular vote the Whigs did better than their electoral vote would indicate:

Pierce	1,601,474
Scott	1,386,580
Hale	156,667

In 1848 Van Buren had secured 291,263 votes on the Free Soil ticket. With their vote cut almost in half, the antislavery forces were naturally disappointed. Their loss outside of New York, however, was not nearly so great proportionately. If we omit from both 1848 and 1852 the vote of New York, where the personal popularity of the "Little Magician" and the Barnburners' organization were important factors in the former year, the totals read:

Van Buren	1848	170,753
Hale	1852	131,338

accredited female reporter to cover a national convention. *Pgh. Sat. V.*, Aug. 21.

There were four other weekly publications in Pittsburgh in 1852. Two of these, the *Presbyterian Banner* and *Pittsburgh Christian Advocate* (Methodist), were religious publications rather than general newspapers. The former was not available to the writer; the latter made no mention of the convention nor, indeed, of the election. *Der Freiheits Freund und Pittsburgher Beobachter* briefly informed its readers of the crowds in "alle öffentlichen Hotels" and spoke highly of the "Talenten und . . . Persönlichkeiten" of the delegates; it also published the platform in German. Aug. 13, 20. The fourth weekly, the *Iron City and Pittsburgh Weekly Chronicle*, could not be located.

⁴¹ The votes in the following discussion are from Stanwood, *History of the Presidency*, I, *passim*.

Some antislavery men argued that the 1852 vote should be compared with that of 1844, rather than 1848 when the party had not been a true antislavery organization.⁴² In 1844 the Liberty Party had secured only 62,300 votes.

At the Pittsburgh convention in August there had been hopeful speculation that the losing major party would give up its Southern wing and go all out for the antislavery vote of the North in 1856. The poor showing of Hale in November dimmed this hope; on the other hand, the disastrous Whig electoral defeat made the *New York Times* and *Tribune* and many prominent Whigs believe their party was dead. As 1852 drew to a close the Whig position appeared hopeless. Clay and Webster were dead and the supply of prominent generals had been exhausted. The party had always been short of principles, and now it lacked leaders. At that time a political pundit might have confidently predicted many years in power for the Democratic Party. One could hardly expect him to foresee that just thirteen months later a young Senator from Illinois would report a bill out of the Territorial Committee that would bring about, to use Roy F. Nichols's phrase, "The Disruption of American Democracy."

⁴² Clark, *Julian*, 138. Pennsylvania's vote in the three elections was as follows:

	Whig	Democrat	Third Party
1844	161,203	167,535	3,138
1848	185,513	171,176	11,263
1852	179,174	198,568	8,525