

MEN, MORALS, AND MANIPULATION IN THE PENNSYLVANIA DEMOCRACY OF 1875

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PENNSYLVANIA shared generously in the spectacular expansion and economic growth of the United States which characterized the two decades between 1850 and 1870. In these years the Keystone State changed from the commercial, small industrial, agrarian economic base which characterized the national period to a more complex and dynamic pattern, founded on coal, oil, steel, and a superb railroad network. These changes induced increasing urbanization and gradual polarization of the new interests in the eastern counties with Philadelphia as a focus, and in the western tier of counties lying between Pittsburgh and Oil City. In addition, organized labor, as represented by the Knights of Labor, became a political force to be recognized for the first time. In between lay the mountain and farming sections which contained the trackage of the railroads of the State. This transportation network was dominated by the Pennsylvania Central, later to be known as the Pennsylvania Railroad. The Reading Railroad was the only significant rival of the empire of Tom Scott & Company for the economic and political control of the state.

Such developments were bound to produce reverberations and realignments within the existing political system, even without the added emotional, patriotic, and economic impact of the Civil War and its issues. The once majestic Democratic machine of the State suffered a shattering experience during Buchanan's years in the White House. His patronage and personnel policies in Pennsylvania, and the subsequent loss of the State in the election of 1860, when combined with the general discrediting of the national and state policies of the Lancaster leader, loosened the

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political cement of the organization and left it to the mercy of the youthful and ruthless Republican cohorts.¹

The war and early reconstruction years added still more to the eclipse of the old "American Democracy" in both State and nation. When the Radicals took over the Republican party sometime between 1862 and 1866, they claimed a near monopoly on patriotism and convinced much of the northern electorate that Republicanism was synonymous with Americanism.² In those same years the business elements who had opposed Lincoln in 1860 and after, jumped on the Radical band wagon in great numbers.³ They received lucrative war contracts and friendly legislation and then set about the task of silencing criticism. One of their more effective techniques made the Democrats the victims of a pre-20th century application of the "guilt by association theory," because of the presence of Copperheads and unreconstructed rebels in the party nationally.⁴ Confronted by a firmly entrenched political opposition and a new milieu based on the changing economic base of the state, several of the leaders of the Pennsylvania Democracy seem to have made their peace with reality. Some shifted party allegiance, others were content with silence or weak protests in the presence of corruption, and a few were charged with accepting the "corporation collar" and becoming silent junior partners with the Republican leaders.

It should also be noted that, since the virtual elimination of old-style Jacksonian principles in the years just before the war, the Democratic party in many northern states had acquired a taste for conservatism. This addiction to Hunkerism was enhanced when many Whigs moved over into the ranks of the Democrats. Such a group, stressing the old-fashioned mores, procedures and principles, was not equipped to keep pace with the explosive transformation and growth of American society in the

¹ Roy F. Nichols, *The Disruption of American Democracy* (New York, 1948), 203-207.

² This general theme is implicit in such works as Howard K. Beale, *The Critical Year* (New York, 1930), William B. Hesseltine, *Ulysses S. Grant, Politician* (New York, 1935), and T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and the Radicals* (Madison, 1941).

³ Wilfred E. Binkley, *American Political Parties, Their Natural History* (New York, 1947), 232-234, 249-257.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Chap. XI, *passim*. See also Beale, *op. cit.*, and Albert V. House, Jr., "Northern Congressional Democrats as Defenders of the South During Reconstruction," *Journal of Southern History*, VI (February, 1940), 50.

years 1850 to 1870. Its representation was greatly reduced in the national House of Representatives and practically wiped out in the Senate. Although a few adequate state leaders such as Seymour of New York appeared on the scene, the general tendency was one of party confusion and expediency which culminated in the suicidal Democratic endorsement of Horace Greeley, the Liberal Republican Presidential candidate in 1872.

In the wake of the political debacle of Grant's reelection, responsible leaders within the Democratic party could only stand by and wait for a major disaster to overtake the opposition. This would bring a sweeping reaction on the part of the electorate and might provide the Democrats with the opportunity for a thermidorian tidying-up of public policies, practices, and principles.⁵ There was also the possibility that intra-party rivalries among Republican leaders and supporters might give the Democrats a chance to acquire power, especially in such states as Pennsylvania, where a great variety of economic interests were in the arena.

The Panic of 1873 and its aftermath qualified as the sweeping catastrophe and in 1874 produced the long-awaited political reaction in favor of the Democrats, both on the national stage and in many states. Pennsylvania sent 17 Democrats to the National House of Representatives and a Democratic majority to the lower house at Harrisburg. In addition, a few Democrats were elected to the executive branch of the state government, including J. F. Temple as Auditor-General.⁶ Such an official would be in a position to strike mighty blows for the party in the event of any legislative investigation of past or present financial chicanery with public funds. Improving Democratic political fortunes presented a challenge to the leadership of the party. Could the current Democratic commanders exploit this opportunity, or were many of them captives of the opposition because of their silent sharing in Republican spoils in past years? If new leaders were needed where were they to come from, and what techniques would be required to remove any tainted or hesitant leaders? This presented a real problem, since in such states as Pennsylvania by 1875 most of the men in the forefront of the ranks of both parties had some corporate connections. It was also questionable just how enduring

⁵ Binkley, *op. cit.*, 301-302, and House, *op. cit.*, 57-58.

⁶ The New York *Sun*, June 21, 1875.

would be the wrath of an electorate which had learned to judge success in dollars rather than in respect, and which at least tolerated the Tweed and Canal rings in New York, the corruption of such black-and-tan reconstruction legislatures as that in South Carolina, and a Whiskey Ring and Credit Mobilier on the national stage.

In Pennsylvania rumor had it that the Pennsylvania railroad gang and a ring of Treasury Thieves had been systematically plundering the public treasury and natural resources of the state during the fifteen or more years of Republican control. Gossip also hinted that many Democratic leaders and newspapers had shared in the booty. In particular, it was charged in 1875 that William A. Wallace of Clearfield, a former Vice-President of Tom Scott's Texas and Pacific Railroad, had been the beneficiary of the opposition. Since Wallace, then a State Senator and about to be elected to the United States Senate, was the generally accepted spokesman for the Democratic party in the State, this was a serious charge. The plunderers also had supposedly bought up or acquired hidden control of the *Harrisburg Patriot*, the leading Democratic journal in the State. Finally it seemed that previous promising legislative attempts to investigate the alleged wrongdoing had been disrupted by opportune appointment of the curious legislators to lucrative judgeships.⁷ Obviously, the Democratic party could not go anywhere in the State until many of these seemingly outrageous claims had been sifted and the wrong-doers (if any) driven out of politics or possibly into the penitentiary. The situation was clamoring for new strong leaders and a campaign of exposure to break the hold of such alleged scoundrels on the state and the political organizations of both parties. Any bright young man or group of men who could bring this off would be in the saddle for some time to come.

⁷ This summary sketch of the operations of the alleged "Ring" is a synthesis of various articles in the press: especially the *New York World*, July 19, 21, August 2, 3, 1875, and the *New York Sun*, February 25, March 1, and June 16, 1875. These allegations are confirmed at least partially by the extensive correspondence of Chauncey F. Black in the *Jeremiah Black MSS.* (Library of Congress) and letters from a host of correspondents in the *Samuel J. Randall MSS.* (University of Pennsylvania Library.) Both of these collections will be cited in this study, BUT UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, all citations to letters will be to the *Black MSS.*

The Third Congressional district of Pennsylvania, in Philadelphia, had returned Samuel J. Randall to Washington continuously since 1863. He had built a creditable record there and was generally conceded to be one of the outstanding candidates for the speakership of the House of Representatives which (barring a special session) would organize and choose its speaker in December, 1875. If Randall wished to make substantial additional progress towards the speakership after the overturn of 1874, he would need to demonstrate still further his qualities in the short session of Congress from December, 1874, to March, 1875, and organize support in those states which had elected sizable Democratic delegations to the new House. Above all else, he must have votes of all seventeen of the Democrats from Pennsylvania and must be accepted as the leader of his party in his State.

The possible targets for any campaign of exposure were numerous and possibly embarrassing to the would-be reformers. The railroads had been such an important factor in economic development that they were well regarded by the public. Their position was so strong that, regardless of the existence of many examples of unfair or possibly illegal railroad influence, it seemed unlikely that any investigative program would make rapid progress or produce results as quickly as was desired. Therefore, a plan took shape to make the voters of the State conscious of the strong possibility that their tax money had been outrageously mishandled for many years by Republican State Treasurers. It was also hoped that it could be demonstrated that many of the current leaders of the Democracy had acquiesced in this mismanagement and probably shared in the profits of these operations. William H. Kemble, who was State Treasurer for one year only, and Robert Mackey, the current occupant who had held the position both before and after Kemble, were to be used as the whipping boys for the onslaught. The charges included confiscation of interest on the State's money in private banks, stuffing the Sinking Fund with worthless railroad and industrial bonds in violation of the State Constitution, illegal borrowing from that fund, and indirect lending of the State's credit to private enterprises. These activities were supposedly protected by a "cabal of thieves" which dominated the State legislature, the State Treasurer, and his watch-dog, the

Auditor-General; all this done regardless of party affiliation.⁸ Such a campaign if successful would make various Republicans run for cover, would save the taxpayers a few dollars, would purge and revitalize the Democratic party, and finally would considerably enhance the prospects of Samuel J. Randall's being elected the next Speaker of the United States House of Representatives in December, 1875.

The resources available for this program were not inconsiderable. They included both Judge Jeremiah Black of York and his son Chauncey. The Judge had been in Buchanan's cabinet and was one of the most distinguished and respected members of the bar with a practice all up and down the east coast, especially in Washington, D. C. He was one of the rivals of Wallace in the Democratic caucus in January, 1875, which sent Wallace to the United States Senate.⁹ He was also part-owner of the *Philadelphia Times*, a new non-partisan journal edited by Alexander K. McClure.¹⁰ His son had shared in the political contacts of the Judge and in the 1880's was to be Lieutenant Governor of his State. He made his living both as a politician and as a writer.¹¹ He possessed a magic editorial pen, boundless perseverance, and a burning desire to expose the misdeeds and mistakes of his opponents regardless of party. Just on the eve of this 1875 campaign Charles A. Dana of the *New York Sun* had offered him the editorship of that journal. He had refused the proffer only to have Dana ask him to reconsider his refusal.¹² *The Sun* had an extensive circulation in Pennsylvania and Dana had already tangled with W. H. Kemble in a law suit growing out of Dana's publishing the famous "Addition, Division, and Silence," letter which had been authored

⁸ The *World*, August 2, 1875; also "Report of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives on the Condition of the Treasury," dated July 16, 1875, and reprinted in the *World*, July 19, 1875, and the *Philadelphia Record*, July 20, 1875; also the *Sun*, February 6, 25, and March 1, 9, 1875. See also letter, Samuel J. Randall to Chauncey F. Black, March 31, 1875.

⁹ The *Philadelphia Record*, January 15, 1875.

¹⁰ Letters, Alexander K. McClure to Jeremiah S. Black, December 7, 17, 25, 1874, and February 18, March 6, 10, 1875.

¹¹ This is illustrated by his ghost-writer authorship of Ward H. Lamson's, *The Life of Lincoln* (Boston, 1872). See Albert V. House, Jr., "The Trials of a Ghost-Writer of Lincoln Biography," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XXXI (September, 1938), 262-296.

¹² Letters, A. M. Gibson to Chauncey Black, April 16, 1874, and C. F. Black to J. S. Black, April 14, 1874.

by Kemble.¹³ Thus, any articles or even editorials sent to Dana by C. F. Black would receive friendly consideration.

W. B. Reed, who had served as envoy to China, journalist, lecturer in American History, and part-time politician, had been a long-time friend of the father of Samuel J. Randall.¹⁴ Reed, now quite elderly and not far from death's door, was semi-retired and living in New York City. He might be classified as a free lance writer who peddled his specialty articles to various New York newspapers. His best market in 1875 was Manton Marble's *New York World*, which also had a heavy circulation in various parts of Pennsylvania. Reed had retained his political contacts in his old home state and was keenly interested in cleaning up his party there and promoting the interests of his friends such as Randall and the Blacks. He ferreted out additional rumors of ring influence and skulduggery and passed the word on to Randall for action. He served as liaison with Marble in the hiring of a special investigator to write articles on the alleged mess for the *World*.¹⁵ This last idea was suggested by the roving reporter himself, one J. W. Cooper, a friend of the Blacks, who had once worked for B. F. Meyers and the *Harrisburg Patriot*. He offered his services to Chauncey Black in May, 1875, with the promise of a "delectable stink if Mr. Dana would give him a commission *de damn rascalio inquirendo*." However, he was actually hired to work for Marble and the *World* at \$100 a month, plus expenses. Randall offered to pay one-half of the cost of this project if necessary.¹⁶ Still another experienced and sophisticated newspaper man who joined the team was A. M. Gibson of York, a friend of the Blacks. He periodically worked for the *New York Sun* as its Washington correspondent. In 1875 he was employed by a Philadelphia paper but he left to return to the employ of the *Sun* and devoted his energies as a right-bower to Chauncey Black in running down the history of the ring's "stealing" for many years past.

Other outlets that could be used for the exposure of the alleged thieves included the *Lancaster Intelligencer*, under the joint edi-

¹³ The *Sun*, January 6, 20, and February 6, 1875.

¹⁴ Nichols, *op. cit.*, 43.

¹⁵ Letters, W. B. Reed to C. F. Black, June 22, 24, 30 and July 7, 1875; W. B. Reed to J. S. Black, June 23, 24, 1875. Telegrams, W. B. Reed to C. F. Black, July 2, 3, 1875, and J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, July 3, 1875.

¹⁶ Letters, J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, June 18, 28, 1875; S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, June 30, 1875.

torship of A. J. Steinman and W. U. Hensel, and the *Commonwealth* in Philadelphia which was edited by Richard Vaux, a former Democratic mayor of the city and an excitable old war horse of many political wars. The Pennsylvania Grange under the leadership of Victor E. Piolette responded to the barrage of exposure and supported all attempts to end the stealing. The Knights of Labor supported Hendrick B. Wright of Luzerne County, who later became a vigorous proponent of the anti-ring cause. As previously noted it was expected that a Democratic majority in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives would be happy to sponsor a legislative investigation of the irregularities. Both Dana and Randall were also counting quite heavily on the fact that J. F. Temple, an anti-ring Democrat, would take over the office of Auditor-General on May 1, 1875, and supposedly have access to the records of State finances in recent years.¹⁷

Randall was the natural commanding general or supervising director of this entire "Operation Exposure." His rapidly increasing national stature was enhanced still more by his brilliant and successful filibusters in January and February, 1875, against the passage of the Civil Rights and Force Bills in Congress.¹⁸ His quite spotless reputation for integrity and personal honesty was unusual and his hold over the Democratic electorate of Philadelphia County was considerable. He was respected even by the better Republican newspapers in his home city, such as the *Public Ledger* and the *Inquirer*. His friendship with the Blacks, father and son, was of long duration and his contacts with journalists and political leaders in Pennsylvania, New York, and New England were substantial. True, he did not have an adequate personal acquaintance with Democratic county leaders in the western and central portions of the State, nor did he know all of the new Democratic congressmen whom Pennsylvania had selected in the near-landslide of 1874. Yet, this deficiency could disappear if the party membership generally were to become genuinely aroused by the effectiveness of the attack on the ring. A species of band-wagon psychology would probably set in as the succession of journalistic blasts and investigative reports took hold on the consciousness of the public.

¹⁷ The *Sun*, February 25, 1875; letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 3, 1875.

¹⁸ Letters from many, many correspondents from various parts of the United States, as well as numerous press clippings in the *Randall MSS.* in February and March 1875, attest to this.

The only serious drawback to Randall's effectiveness as the chief of the campaign arose from the fact that he could not devote his full energies and time to the project. He was still a Congressman, with many demands being made by his constituents. He was also very, very busy during all of 1875 organizing and developing support for his candidacy for the Speakership. This required considerable travel to New England, New York, Washington, Richmond and points south, as well as endless correspondence which he handled without the assistance of a secretary.

In January, 1875, Randall opened the battle by penning (with the help of Chauncey Black) two resolutions to be introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. One was rather mild and merely called for a report on the condition of the Pennsylvania Treasury and Sinking Fund as of that date. The other provided for a sweeping investigation of the handling of those agencies for the past fifteen years. He gave these personally to Robert E. Patterson, the new Democratic speaker of the Pennsylvania Lower House who promised to push them through.¹⁹ Early action was required, since if the investigation were conducted while the legislature was in session, the House alone could make money available. If action were postponed and the inquiry became an interim examination, money would *never* be voted for this purpose by both houses. Late in February, with the bills still in committee, Randall met Patterson in Philadelphia and again received his promise of favorable action.²⁰ This was achieved on March 2, shortly before the legislature adjourned on March 18, 1875. So the fledgling committee was without money to hire expert assistance or pay travel expenses. With O. H. Reighard as chairman, the committee called on Mackey at his office in late April to examine his books. But the Treasurer refused to recognize their authority or let an expert accountant look at the records. The committee did not push its case and retired from the office.²¹

¹⁹ The *Sun*, January 20 and February 6, 1875; letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, March 31, 1875.

²⁰ Letters, S. Jones to C. A. Dana, March 2, 1875, quoting a letter from S. J. Randall; this was forwarded by Dana to C. F. Black with a comment: S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, March 31, 1875.

²¹ The *Sun*, May 4, 1875. This demonstration of timidity probably was no surprise to Randall since A. W. Fletcher, his personal agent in Philadelphia, had reported on a meeting of the committee which he had attended on April 14, 1875. He then informed Randall that "he was satisfied that Reighard.

Henceforth, its work was sporadic and somewhat ineffectual until after the State Democratic convention in September. It did, however, make a preliminary interim report in July, with most of the material for that document supplied by volunteers such as Black, Randall & co.²²

Meanwhile a rather vigorous and complete campaign of newspaper publicity was launched by the main "conspirators," using the information channels previously described. This brought a vigorous reaction from the ring press in late March and April. By the time that the Republican State convention met in Lancaster in May, Treasurer Mackey had become a political liability and he was dropped from the ticket of nominees for State office for the coming year.²³ June was not a very profitable month for the reformers. Dana, Randall, and others were dismayed that Temple, the new Auditor-General, took no steps to demand an accounting of the status of the Sinking Fund. Obviously, something rather drastic would have to be done to get the campaign off dead center. Both New York papers were hesitating somewhat, and new data were badly needed to get things moving again. Randall and Judge Black made personal trips to New York which resulted in the hiring of both Cooper and Gibson as roving reporters.²⁴ Cooper especially was able to bring about results within a few days after commencing his labors early in July. He prodded Temple into action and supplied Chauncey Black with the material for some blistering articles in the *New York Sun* on July 10, and July 14, 1875. The revival of interest in the charges may have also been a factor in encouraging the legislative committee to issue its interim report on July 16. This was a damaging review of the entire record of the ring and its henchmen in previous years. Randall had more than his usual success in placing flyers and full length articles in Philadelphia papers, and he noted with satisfaction that many papers throughout the State were beginning to reprint much of the material in the metropolitan papers.²⁵

Gunster, & Embeck had been fixed, but that Smith & Wise are honest." He was convinced that nothing would come of the investigation and that the Democratic newspapers of the State should expose the three traitors. Letter, A. W. Fletcher to S. J. Randall, April 15, 1875, *Randall MSS.*

²² See Note 8 above.

²³ The *Sun*, May 22, 25, 26, 27, 1875.

²⁴ Letters, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, June 30, 1875; W. B. Reed to C. F. Black, June 23, 1875.

²⁵ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 24, 1875.

Just when Randall & Co. were beginning to draw blood, two very severe setbacks occurred. First, J. W. Cooper had the misfortune to have some personal letters from Randall, Reed, and Chauncey Black stolen from the locked desk in his boarding house room in Harrisburg. Garbled excerpts from some of these soon appeared in the *Harrisburg Patriot*, with the implication that a group of cheap mud-slingers were engaged in besmirching the good names of all Democratic leaders.²⁶ This news caused Reed in New York to release for publication a lengthy article which traced the ownership of the *Patriot* to the Wallace family and suggested that the funds for this transaction had come from the State Treasury through ring influence.²⁷ On August 2, Chauncey Black published an open letter (originally in the *Lancaster Intelligencer*) in the *New York World* in which he noted that the *Patriot* had not mentioned Randall's name or the fact that they had some of his letters too. He taunted them for not including him in the "conspiracy" because they knew that the public would not believe that Sam Randall could be engaged in any low-down plot.²⁸

Another reversal of fortune came to light in late July when Attorney General Samuel E. Dimmick published his legal opinion (in answer to Temple's request) regarding the power of the Auditor-General to require a full statement from the Treasurer as to the status of the Sinking Fund. He pointed out that the act of May 9, 1874, required that "the Treasurer's statement of account to the Auditor-General shall be exclusive of moneys appropriated to the Sinking Fund and hence the Treasurer is not compelled to make such report to the Auditor-General, and the latter is not authorized to require it."²⁹ This was probably an adequate interpretation of the Act which had allegedly been passed by a ring-dominated legislature to protect themselves from just such circumstances as had eventuated from Temple's request. There was a strong probability that the act was unconstitutional, but

²⁶ Letters, C. A. Dana to C. F. Black, July 16, 1875; S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 19 and 24, 1875.

²⁷ The *New York World*, July 21, 1875; Letters, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 19, 1875; W. B. Reed to C. F. Black, July 8 and 14, 1875; J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, July 10 and 13, 1875.

²⁸ This was carried personally to New York by Randall for publication. See letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 28, 1875.

²⁹ The *World*, August 3, 1875; letters, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 3 and 24, 1875.

there was not time to get a ruling from the courts that would produce results quickly. This was the first public knowledge that such a subterfuge existed, and it provided the anti-ring journals with an opportunity to roar again.

On August 2, 1875, the Commissioners of the Sinking Fund, viz.: Treasurer Mackey, Secretary Matthew Quay, and J. F. Temple held a meeting at which (*mirabile dictu*) they did just what the constitutional amendment of 1857 had provided for. They actually retired some State securities with funds available in the Sinking Fund. In addition, Mackey "voluntarily" submitted a detailed statement of the condition of the Treasury, with a list of depositories of State Funds, including the Sinking Fund; all this supported by vouchers and a request that the board examine and verify the same. In a subsequent issue the *Sun* rather cynically but probably truthfully pointed out that "this merely means that the Sinking Fund was not robbed this trip."³⁰ Needless to say, the list of depositories gave Randall, Black and their colleagues a field day in checking on and reporting the political favoritism and other factors which had been present in this distribution of State moneys.

The maximum of verbal firepower of the campaign was exploded on August 2 and 3, 1875, in the *New York World*. These two days carried lengthy news reports (from Cooper in Harrisburg) on Attorney General Dimmick's opinion and a July meeting of the Sinking Fund Commissioners. A full column editorial, probably from the pens of Chauncey Black and W. B. Reed, was supplemented by the two-column "open letter" by Chauncey Black on the theft of Cooper's private correspondence. In subsequent weeks Manton Marble seems to have lost interest somewhat in the contest, since articles and news items on "the rascals" appeared less frequently, and J. W. Cooper began to complain about not receiving his expense and salary checks.³¹ As early as July 1, 1875, Randall had bewailed the lack of "a paper in Pennsylvania which will call worthless by the right names" and had suggested starting such a paper in Pittsburgh.³² The early reluctance of Pennsylvania papers to print the explosive material provided by Randall, Black & Company had necessitated reliance on the New

³⁰ The *Sun*, August 9, 1875.

³¹ Letter, J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, October 23, 1875.

³² Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 1, 1875.

York metropolitan journals. Now the *World* was withdrawing somewhat from the campaign.

The New York *Sun*, however, continued to lead the fight and greatly increased its Pennsylvania circulation as a result. A. M. Gibson, who had been attempting to help Alexander K. McClure get his new Philadelphia *Times* in operation, became disgusted and left that journal in late July, 1875, to return to the *Sun*.³³ He and other correspondents supplied Dana with a series of damaging reviews of the whole "sink of corruption" for publication in late August and early September, 1875.³⁴ Gibson followed up this series of articles by covering the Pennsylvania State Democratic Convention in early September at Erie, from where he reported that the *Sun* had and continued to have considerable influence among the delegates from many parts of the State.³⁵

The climax of this entire campaign against the Treasury ring was to be this Democratic Convention at Erie on September 8, 1875. In many of his letters during the summer Chauncey Black hinted that Randall would receive his just due on that occasion. While genuinely disturbed at the criminal practices which had been uncovered, Randall knew that his great chance to control the Pennsylvania Democracy had arrived. His letters made continual references to his correspondence with various Democratic leaders throughout the State, while many Democratic county leaders had their newspaper knowledge of the ring and their understanding of Randall's claims to the Speakership supplemented by personal letters from Randall. He was really fortunate in having the support of many influential friends whom he asked to "make the issue square and direct against Mackey in your county conventions."³⁶ Senator Wallace, Democratic Central Committee Chairman Miller and others tried to interfere with Randall's control of the Philadelphia delegation, but just before the convention met Randall told Black that "Our delegation is intensely anti-ring. Hurrah for that. Cash may change some—but we will drum them out of camp to tune of Rogue's march if they fall by wayside."³⁷

³³ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, August 1, 1875.

³⁴ The *Sun*, August 21, 30, 31, September 1 and 4, 1875.

³⁵ Letter, A. M. Gibson to C. F. Black, September 17, 1875.

³⁶ Letters, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, July 9, 28, August 3, 1875.

³⁷ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, September 2, 1875.

Randall and Black worked together in the final weeks to draw up a set of anti-ring resolutions to be presented to the convention. They evidently were composed by Black since on August 18, Randall sent back a copy of these resolutions with the comment that "they are sound—and well can be incorporated in Erie platform. Wallace will go as far as we wish on Resolutions for reasons apparent."³⁸

Randall's lack of acquaintance with some of the leaders in his party and his lack of confidence in the integrity of most of the men put forward as candidates for Governor and Treasurer in pre-convention days, may have been responsible for his refusal to support openly any particular candidates. However, his seeming lack of enthusiasm for any of the leading candidates may mean that he really was more interested in licking the ring and in getting publicity and power for Samuel Jackson Randall.

Randall had planned to "camp on the ground at Erie on Saturday, September 4, and wanted both Chauncey and his father to promise to be there."³⁹ He actually arrived at Erie on Monday, September 6, quite alone, since Senator Buckalew, Mayor Vaux and Chauncey Black were not present.⁴⁰ The convention which he was attempting to capture was composed of 239 delegates, most of whom were without parliamentary experience. Feeling against the ring seemed so strong that the *Sun* reported that candidates were avoiding Wallace for fear of losing support.⁴¹ The entire Pennsylvania Democratic delegation from the United States House of Representatives was there, all seemingly supporting Randall for the next Speaker of that body and willing to work for him in this convention at Erie.⁴² Wallace had the unexpected help of George W. Cass, the former President of the Northern Pacific Railroad, and also the assistance of State Senator Rutan who acted as his errand boy. It was rumored that Wallace approached Randall wanting to make peace, but the fight continued in earnest.⁴³ All participants and observers knew that the real fight would come on the floor of the convention.

³⁸ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, August 18, 1875.

³⁹ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, August 2, 1875.

⁴⁰ The *Sun*, September 7, 1875; Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, September 2, 1875.

⁴¹ The *Sun*, September 8, 1875.

⁴² *Ibid.*; The *World*, September 8, 1875.

⁴³ The *Sun*, September 11, 1875.

The choice of Ellis of Philadelphia for Temporary President was somewhat of a triumph for the Randall wing since, although Ellis may have been somewhat associated with the ring element, nevertheless John Miller, the chairman of the State Central Committee, was thus left out in the cold. The choice of Hendrick B. Wright of Luzerne for permanent chairman was a mixed blessing for Randall, since Wright could not resist the opportunity to deliver a demagogic harangue on inflation, thus introducing a new issue which eventually contributed to the downfall of the party at the polls. By playing up the money issue the ring element nearly succeeded in tearing the convention apart. Such strategy tended to relegate the ring issue to the background and therefore to defeat Randall's plans.⁴⁴ Randall served on the Resolutions committee which finally by a 25-24 vote brought in a compromise resolution on inflation, which was a rather complete summary of the banking and currency ideas which Randall had been advocating in Congress since 1866.⁴⁵ Yet Chairman Frank W. Hughes of Schuylkill refused to report this resolution; hence the committee met again and finally sent in a currency platform which embraced the "Ohio Idea." The Treasury resolutions of Randall and Black were written into the platform in section four which condemned the management of the State's finances by the present State Treasurer, in section five which called for a searching and thorough investigation of the State Treasury, and in section six which pledged the nominees of the convention to apply all the Sinking Fund money to the Sinking Fund as required by law.⁴⁶

When the balloting for Governor began, Randall discovered that twenty-three of his Philadelphia delegation had been bought out; they now voted for Ross, the Wallace candidate. After the tenth ballot the name of Bigler was withdrawn and his fifty-three votes given to Pershing, which resulted in the choice of the latter by a vote of 145 to 94 for Ross.⁴⁷ Then the convention moved on to the problem of selecting a candidate for Treasurer. After the

⁴⁴ The *Philadelphia Record*, September 9, 1875; The *Sun*, September 9, 10, 1875.

⁴⁵ See *Congressional Globe*, June 6, 1866, July 25, 1866, February 21, 1867, July 15, 1867, January 16, 28, 1868, February 20, 1868, March 11, 19, 1868, July 18, 28, 1868, December 16, 1869, March 12, 1870, June 8, 1870, and July 7, 1870.

⁴⁶ The *Philadelphia Record*, September 11, 1875.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*; The *Sun*, September 10, 1875.

first ballot brought no choice, Chairman Wright tried to recess the convention, but Randall's henchman McMullin and a considerable number of "Philadelphia toughs" leaped upon the stage and forced the Chairman back to his seat to continue the balloting. This forcible technique brought speedy victory for the anti-ring group; Piolette, the horny-handed leader of the Grange, was nominated on the third ballot with a total of 124. Playford, the supposed ring candidate, ran second with 64 votes while Noble, who was considered to be Wallace's personal candidate, brought up the rear with 47.⁴⁸

The weeks immediately following the convention brought developments which demonstrated Randall's growing power among the members of the Pennsylvania Democracy. The *Sun* felt very satisfied with the work of the convention, regarding it as a complete demonstration of the overthrow of the ring elements within the party.⁴⁹ On September 17, A. M. Gibson wrote Chauncey Black a lengthy letter telling of the victory over the ring and the real harm done to Wallace as well as the complete defeat of the Senator's tickets and the tremendous ill-feeling all over the state against the ring.⁵⁰ A week later Randall wrote to Chauncey, thanking Providence for his success at Erie and mentioning the fact that Reighard, the chairman of the House Treasury Investigation Committee, had become one of his ardent supporters.⁵¹ The same day Gibson again wrote Black that :

"... the result of Erie is Randall's absolute supremacy in the state. He daily receives intelligence from every quarter of the state assuring him of the devotions of this and that man. But if Ohio goes wrong and we lose Penn the Wallace men will cry 'we told you so.'"⁵²

With all this success Randall kept up the assault on the rascals by compiling, with the aid of Cooper and Chauncey Black, a circular which aimed to lay the facts of State misgovernment before the electorate of Pennsylvania as the central issue: thus forestalling any attempt to divert attention to the issue of inflation.⁵³

⁴⁸ The *Sun*, September 11, 1875.

⁴⁹ The *Sun*, September 11, 20, 1875.

⁵⁰ Letter, A. M. Gibson to C. F. Black, September 17, 1875.

⁵¹ Letter, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, September 25, 1875.

⁵² Letter, A. M. Gibson to C. F. Black, September 25, 1875.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Randall's next major problem was the selection of a new chairman of the State Democratic Central Committee. Wallace wanted John Miller to continue.⁵⁴ Pershing, the gubernatorial nominee, supported Frank Hughes of Schuylkill, while Piolette was pushing for General W. W. H. Davis.⁵⁵ Randall was in constant communication with Hendrick B. Wright of Luzerne County and finally succeeded in having his old friend appointed as a compromise.⁵⁶ Although Wright was somewhat of an inflationist and had been associated with many "radical" groups, still Randall justifiably regarded the appointment as his own personal victory and even continued to make arrangements for party councils without first consulting the new chairman.⁵⁷

Scenting new leadership, O. H. Reighard decided to follow the instructions of the Erie convention by opening official hearings on the Treasury on October 7.⁵⁸ He had seemingly been taking orders from Wallace all summer, but now threw himself on the mercy of Randall and Chauncey Black,⁵⁹ who hastened to provide him with pointed questions for the cross-examination of witnesses and even sent Gibson and Cooper to Harrisburg to take unofficial charge of the hearings.⁶⁰ Gibson took a hurried trip to Washington during a recess in the hearings but failed to return in time. Cooper became very sick with some bilious affliction and from worry over not receiving his pay from the *World*.⁶¹

⁵⁴ Letters, C. B. Johnson to H. B. Wright, September 15, 1875; S. J. Randall to H. B. Wright, September 13, 14, 1875; Alex Cummings to H. B. Wright, September 14, 1875, *Hendrick B. Wright MSS.* (Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Wilkes-Barre).

⁵⁵ Letter, S. J. Randall to H. B. Wright, September 14, 1875, *Wright MSS.*

⁵⁶ Letter, S. J. Randall to H. B. Wright, September 16, 1875, *Wright MSS.*

⁵⁷ Letters, S. J. Randall to H. B. Wright, September 18, 20, 1875, and October 4, 1875; A. W. Fletcher to H. B. Wright, September 18, 1875, *Wright MSS.* These letters show that Randall issued the call and had his man Fletcher send out invitations for the first meeting of the new State Democratic Committee in Philadelphia on September 25, 1875. They also reveal that Randall went to Pittsburgh on Monday, September 27, 1875, to meet Colonel Thompson of Columbus, Ohio, the chairman of the State Democratic Committee in Ohio, to plan joint electoral strategy, possibly on the inflation issue.

⁵⁸ *The Sun*, October 8, 1875.

⁵⁹ Letters, O. H. Reighard to C. F. Black, September 17, 1875; S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, September 25, 1875; O. H. Reighard to S. J. Randall, October 1, 1875. Randall later forwarded this note of Reighard to C. F. Black.

⁶⁰ Letters, O. H. Reighard to S. J. Randall, October 1, 1875; O. H. Reighard to C. F. Black, October 8, 1875; A. M. Gibson to C. F. Black, October 2, 7, 12, 1875; J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, October 15, 1875.

⁶¹ Letters, J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, October 15, 21, 23, 1875.

Such confusion produced disappointing results. Some of the charges against the ring such as unlawful appropriation of interest were proven in a small way, but Mackey and some other "rascals" were successful in ignoring the committee.⁶² Mackey reserved his answer until after the committee had disbanded, one week before the election. He then admitted that he had illegally "borrowed" from the Sinking Fund but claimed that all such borrowings were paid into the General Fund.⁶³ Public wrath against the ring was somewhat diverted by the growing prominence of inflation as an issue. The victory of the hard-money forces in the Ohio election, with the assistance of "that crout-eating Greeleyite, Carl Schurz," greatly dimmed the prospects of the Democrats in Pennsylvania.⁶⁴ The *Sun* fought valiantly to remind the voters of the state that pure, simple honesty in Treasury practices was the issue, but the Democrats were defeated at the polls on November 2, by a majority of about 20,000.⁶⁵

This defeat for the Democracy ended all talk of further investigation of the activities of the ring. Such a miserable end for a campaign begun in high hopes of real reform may suggest that the entire furor was less than genuine and that the charges had no substantial basis of truth. A study of the later activities of some of the accused would reveal at least one who was forced to spend a term behind the bars as well as many others who were forced into political retirement. On the other hand Randall was now about to enter the period of his greatest power in both the national and state arenas. During the summer of 1875 he had often been threatened with loss of support in his expected campaign for the Speakership,⁶⁶ which would culminate in December of that year. Yet all the Pennsylvania Democrats in the National House supported him in this contest despite the fact that some members of the ring continued to "knife him in the back" right down to the day of the Speakership caucus.

If the investigation aimed to cleanse the Democratic party, to protect the people's finances, and to promote the reputation and leadership of Samuel J. Randall, it becomes obvious that consid-

⁶² The *Sun*, October 8, 9, 12, 1875.

⁶³ The *Sun*, October 29, 1875.

⁶⁴ Letter, J. W. Cooper to C. F. Black, October 21, 1875.

⁶⁵ The *Sun*, November 3, 4, 1875; The *Record*, November 3, 4, 1875.

⁶⁶ Letters, S. J. Randall to C. F. Black, June 30, August 3, 18, 1875.

erable progress towards all these ends had been achieved. Although Randall was not elected Speaker in December, 1875, he had reached the very shadow of the throne. During the 1875-76 session of Congress as Chairman of Appropriations he became the most powerful member of his party on the floor of the House. When Speaker Kerr of Indiana died during the summer of 1876, it was a foregone conclusion that Randall would be the next Speaker. Thus, in October, 1876, he began a five-year term as head of that powerful legislative House. Back home in Pennsylvania his ascendancy within the councils of his party grew to towering proportions and continued so for a decade. William A. Wallace served out his term as Senator, but never again were he or his closest colleagues to control the Democracy in Pennsylvania. It seems clear that, although the attempt to wipe out ring influence was only partially successful in 1875, the fact that Randall had been a leader in the effort was one of the continuing reasons for his later influence in his party in the Keystone State. The days of easy manipulation and control of the councils and chiefs of the Democratic Party in Pennsylvania by the opposition and economic interests were ended for a span of years. The conservative and fundamental mores of the old-time Whigs and Hunkers were in the saddle again.