NEWSPAPER OPINION IN THE
STATE ELECTION OF 1860

By Robert L. Bloom*

HISTORIANS are generally agreed that the election campaign of 1860 was one of the two or three most significant in the political history of the republic. It came at the end of four decades of bitter sectional debate. Its immediate result was to place a primarily sectional party in control of the federal government, and this in turn precipitated a secession movement on the part of certain disgruntled southern elements. Resistance to this movement brought on America’s greatest war. Almost incidental at the time but of far-reaching political importance later was the overthrow of the Democratic Party. The Democrats had enjoyed almost uninterrupted success since the days of Thomas Jefferson. Now they were cast aside by the electorate in favor of the Republicans who were to enjoy almost equal success until the days of Franklin D. Roosevelt.

As a rule the story of this significant electoral contest is told merely in terms of the transcendent national issues involved—slavery in the territories, the protective tariff, land policies for the trans-Mississippi West, and internal improvements. That these issues loomed large in the minds of the voters of 1860 cannot be denied, yet we tend to overlook the fact that in large measure the outcome of the campaign was determined in the various state and local election contests. “To a great degree the State campaigns carried the national ticket,” writes an eminent historian. It was “the combined effort of future governors [which] made Lincoln President.”

Pennsylvania was one of the most important states where such contests transpired. Professor Edgar B. Cale has already reviewed

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before this Association the editorial sentiment of Pennsylvania newspapers regarding the large national issues in that campaign.\(^2\)

It is my purpose in this paper to survey newspaper opinion in the state in 1860 with major emphasis on Pennsylvania’s gubernatorial election.

Politicians who participated in the great battle for votes recognized in retrospect the important role played by the Keystone State. James G. Blaine believed that “had the Republicans failed to carry Pennsylvania there can be no doubt that Mr. Lincoln would have been defeated.” Blaine was referring to the state elections in October, “which [were] for so long a period an unerring index ... that a feeling almost akin to superstition was connected with it.”\(^3\) A. K. McClure, who as manager of the Republican campaign in Pennsylvania in 1860, had an unique opportunity to analyze the political currents, agreed: “The [October] contest ... was really the decisive battle of the campaign.”\(^4\) Early in 1859, Illinois politicians advocating Lincoln’s election to the Presidency, took cognizance of the vital role of Pennsylvania and argued that only Lincoln could carry the state for the Republican ticket.\(^5\)

Whether Pennsylvania was or was not so necessary to Republican prospects, party workers of all political camps thought it was. One Republican termed the state “the Sebastopol we must take,” and urged that “every needed help ... should be furnished from the outside.” Democratic editors warned their readers to gird their loins for the battle ahead. “Again circumstances point to the old Keystone State which must decide the pending Presidential contest.”\(^6\)

An important instrumentality in shaping public opinion in 1860 was Pennsylvania’s newspaper press. With little competition from other media, it was in a strategic position to influence political views. “Members of Congress ... are sensitive to newspaper comment,” suggested the Philadelphia Inquirer, “and they look eagerly


\(^3\) Twenty Years in Congress (New York, 1884), I, 206-207.

\(^4\) Abraham Lincoln and Men of War-Times (New York, 1892), 31, 42.


to see what the various journals are saying of them." For this and other reasons aspirants for office sought for ways and means to gain newspaper backing. It appears that some journals were willing to accept financial favors for their editorial support. Russell Errett, the capable editor of the Pittsburgh Gazette, was chosen Clerk of the Pennsylvania Senate "as a reward for his canvass in [Simon] Cameron's behalf during the winter months of 1859." Perhaps more than one of his journalistic colleagues agreed with a writer in the Pittsburgh True Press, that "the editor of a political newspaper deserves something beyond the yields of his journal." 5

Citizens of Pennsylvania were well served, at least quantitatively, by twenty-eight daily and 242 weekly newspapers. 9 They circulated not only throughout the state but extensively in neighboring states. Yet, their editors naturally addressed their "editorial leaders" to Pennsylvania residents and concentrated on Pennsylvania interests and viewpoints.

Although this paper will deal principally with the state campaign of 1860, it goes without saying that Pennsylvanians were deeply interested and often deeply involved in the presidential race. The state's burgeoning manufacturing interests, its geographic location, the fact that it was a traditional stronghold of the Democratic Party, and the importance of its twenty-seven electoral votes drew national attention. The campaign in Pennsylvania was recognized as a test of strength for the Buchanan administration, particularly so since the President still claimed control of the state's Democratic party organization. Buchanan's hold had been severely shaken by the impressive Republican triumph in the 1859 elections, and it is clear that he never commanded the loyalty of an overwhelming majority in the state. 10 Democratic spokesmen still ex-

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5 January 28, 1860.
6 Stanton L. Davis, Pennsylvania Politics, 1860-1863 (Cleveland, 1935), 49-50; Pittsburgh True Press, December 2, 1859. The Harrisburg Telegraph felt it necessary to deny vehemently that it was subsidized by Cameron. See issue of October 22, 1859.
8 Reading Gazette, November 2, 1859. Even Democrats admitted that "New York money and influence" had carried the state for Buchanan in 1856. See Philip S. Foner, Business and Slavery (Chapel Hill, 1941), 135.
pressed confidence in the party's prospects for 1860, hoping to win back the disaffected, and publicly doubting the Opposition's ability to unite. Some took comfort from the experience and ability of their party leaders. But other Democrats, bewildered and dispirited by the open quarrel between the President and Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, were by 1859 deserting the party of their fathers in droves. "If Mr. Buchanan is ever to have his eyes opened . . . to see what the people of his own State think of his party," declared the Philadelphia Evening Bulletin, "now must be the time." 12

The obvious strategy of the Opposition was to attract all the disillusioned into their ranks. "Republicans and Americans," the Harrisburg Telegraph hopefully asserted, "disagreeing on some minor matters, will come together . . . [united by] their unqualified hostility to free-trade and the spread of slavery." 13 If they could take advantage of the new anti-slavery sentiment with which the rank-and-file northern voters were increasingly preoccupied; if they could persuade northern merchants that their future trade lay more with the West than with the South; and if they could play upon the mounting distrust of the Democratic Party's subservience to southern interests, the Opposition's chances for victory throughout the North appeared exceedingly bright. 14

In Pennsylvania the "People's Party" moved early to achieve this unity. 15 The most formidable obstacle to realizing this objective was the simmering feud between Simon Cameron and Andrew G. Curtin, dating from their bitter contest for a seat in the United States Senate in 1855. A modus vivendi was effected, however, at the Republican state convention at Harrisburg on February 22, when the delegates were induced to endorse Cameron for the

11 Davis, op. cit., 70. A. K. McClure says "there never was a party with abler leadership than had the Democrats of Pennsylvania when the campaign of 1860 was about to be opened." See McClure's Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia, 1905), I, 424.

12 October 12, 1859.

13 February 21, 1860.


15 The "People's Party" was an euphemism used in eastern Pennsylvania where Republicanism was too closely associated in the popular mind with the anti-slavery radicalism of "Seward & Company." See Davis, op. cit., 50.
presidency and nominate Curtin for governor.\textsuperscript{16} That this was a sound tactical move the editors of all political persuasions recognized. The Republican press described the arrangement as reflecting "the genius of the Pennsylvania Opposition party... moderation," and hailed Curtin's nomination as "fortuitous."\textsuperscript{17} Democratic newspapers scoffed at Republican claims of party unity behind a Cameron-Curtin ticket, and reported deep dissatisfaction among the Opposition rank-and-file. They widely reprinted the Pittsburgh Commercial Journal's criticisms of a convention dominated by "one man's political ambition." Unity was impossible, Democratic editors agreed, in an assemblage "made up of every shade, stripe, and hue." Indeed, Curtin's selection by this crew proved only that he was as corrupt as everyone knew Cameron to be.\textsuperscript{18}

Political interest soon was transferred to the Democratic state convention at Reading on February 29. Most of the gubernatorial aspirants to be considered were from western Pennsylvania, including Henry D. Foster of Westmoreland County.\textsuperscript{19} After some maneuvering, Foster was unanimously named to make the race for the governor's chair. This was a happy choice for Pennsylvania Democrats in that Foster was on record with a number of statements favorable to the protective tariff principle. His reputation for rectitude and his great ability inspired optimism among Democratic journalists. "We can work with a hearty good will" for Foster, "who will command the vote of every Democrat of the State as well as thousands of conservative citizens." Another editor had no misgivings whatever: "With such a leader and with a harmonious, firm, and united party who can doubt the result?"\textsuperscript{20} Even John W. Forney's Philadelphia Press, now straddling a


\textsuperscript{17} Harrisburg Telegraph, February 24, 1860; Philadelphia North American, February 24, 1860.

\textsuperscript{18} Pittsburgh Daily Post, February 25, 1860; Harrisburg Patriot and Union, February 28, 1860; Bedford Gazette, March 2, 1860; Gettysburg Compiler, March 5, 1860.

\textsuperscript{19} Davis, \textit{op. cit.}, 70-73. See also C. M. Myers, "The Influence of Western Pennsylvania in the Campaign of 1860," \textit{Western Pennsylvania Magazine of History,} XXIV (1941), 234.

\textsuperscript{20} Harrisburg Patriot and Union, March 3, 1860; Pittsburgh Daily Post, March 2, 1860; Gettysburg Compiler, March 19, 1860.
waverings and blurred borderline between Republicanism and
its nominal Democratic affiliation, saw in Foster "a man of high
character, superior talents, and extensive political experience."
Foster and Curtin, continued the Press, "will find in each other
foemen worthy of their steel."

Although Republican editors recognized that Foster's nomina-
tion represented "more wisdom in the selection of their Guber-
natorial candidate than is usually manifested by State Conven-
tions," they criticized his silence on the issues dividing the Demo-
cratic Party. According to one, he was merely "a sort of alkaloid
to bring together the oils and acids of his party." The Reading
c convention was "a cowardly affair," which had nominated a man
who "having no fixed principles of his own . . . can very profitably
turn his attention to the task of convincing the factions of his
party."

The Pennsylvania gubernatorial campaign of 1860 was not
fought on state issues. Indeed, state issues had been dormant for
most of the preceding decade—a fact which partially explains the
meteoric rise of the American, or Know Nothing, Party in Penn-
sylvania during the 1850's. The record and platforms of the na-
tional parties were the primary factors shaping public attitudes.
An increasingly pro-tariff state, Pennsylvania presented a golden
opportunity to the Republicans since the long-standing anti-
protectionist course of their rivals made Democratic candidates
exceedingly vulnerable. Years later James G. Blaine recalled that
"on the other issues of the party [Republicans] had been hope-
lessly beaten, but the moment hostility to slave labor . . . became
identified with protected labor in Pennsylvania, the party was
inspired with new hope . . . indeed, new life."

Aware of the vote-catching appeal embodied in the protective
tariff idea, both state party conventions had called for "adequate
protection" for Pennsylvania manufacturing interests. Curtin's
prospects were bolstered by the fact that he came from a family
of ironmongers. In contrast Foster faced the problem of "guilt

\[32\] March 12, 1860.
\[32\] Greensburg Herald, March 7, 1860; Harrisburg Telegraph, March 2,
1860.
\[32\] Twenty Years in Congress, I, 204-205. Republican campaign strategy
throughout the North was to subordinate the slavery issue in those areas
where "local interests" carried more weight. See James G. Randall, Civil
War and Reconstruction (New York, 1937), 180-181.
by association.” An able man, the Philadelphia *Public Ledger* described him, yet “as long as he acts with a party in favor of free trade he is opposed to the best interests of Pennsylvania.” Republican journals were quick to seize on Foster’s vulnerability on this score and they never let up. As the candidate who held aloft the banners of “Free Trade and Slave Labor,” Foster was compared unfavorably with Curtin, “a faithful and uncompromising champion of Freedom and Home Industry.”

The Democratic press fought an uphill battle in its effort to persuade Pennsylvania voters that adequate protection would come only through Democratic success at the polls. The York *Gazette* drew its own contrast, pointing to Foster’s preoccupation at Washington where, the editor said, he was striving to get congressional support for a tariff bill while Curtin toured Pennsylvania spreading divisive doctrines in behalf of “niggerism and ‘the Nigger.’”

Even Buchanan’s stalwart administration spokesman in Philadelphia, *The Pennsylvanian*, evinced tenderness on the subject, and its editor penned a strong indictment of southern leadership of the party:

Much of the sectional feeling... has its origins in the stubborn opposition of the small fry Southern politicians in Congress to the idea of protecting national industry, while at the same time they are clamoring for protection to the interests of slave labor.

But Democratic protestations that their party favored a protective tariff were undercut by the failure of the Morrill Tariff Bill to get through the Democratically controlled Senate in May. This was grist for the Republican partisan mill. Buchanan, as a native Pennsylvanian they argued, should have lent his support to the measure. “Either he has not a particle of influence with his

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26 Cited in Gettysburg *Compiler*, June 11, 1860.

27 May 14, 1860. See also Reading *Gazette*, May 14, 1860.

28 One student believes the bill was introduced, not with the expectation of its being passed, but to get votes in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. See R. H. Luthin, “Abraham Lincoln and the Tariff,” *American Historical Review*, XL (1944), 612.
party," one editor announced, "or he is the most insincere and treacherous man ever placed in power." "What hope," another Opposition journal asked, "can the friends of Tariff have in a Senate controlled by the same element which laughed down the tariff position at Charleston?"

Even though the tariff question overshadowed others in Pennsylvania, many editors were well aware of the emotional overtones associated with the slavery issue. A perusal of their columns reveals that they expended about as much printer's ink on this problem as on the tariff. For more than three years Buchanan's Kansas policy had stirred up bitter debate in the newspapers and was alienating many Democratic voters. Yet the Keystone State was hardly abolitionist-ridden. Republicans went to some lengths to disavow sympathy with the anti-slavery radicals, perhaps in fear that their hoped-for sources of campaign cash would run dry. Morton McMichael's Philadelphia North American shook an editorial finger at the delegates soon to gather at the Republican national convention at Chicago.

We tell the convention . . . squarely, roundly, and in every other shape that means earnestness, that their candidate cannot carry the State of New Jersey and Pennsylvania . . . on an anti-slavery issue only. Fremont proved that.

The presence of many anti-slavery radicals within Republican ranks gave color to Democratic charges that the Opposition party was abolitionized. The Pittsburgh Daily Post denounced Hinton R. Helper's vehement anti-slavery tract, The Impending Crisis, and castigated the Republicans for circulating it as a political textbook. The attempt of Republicans in the House of Representatives to force John Sherman of Ohio on the South as Speaker of the House was, in the editor's opinion, a deliberate effort to

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32 Philip S. Foner (op. cit., 169-170) says New York merchants, the chief of these sources, were equally repelled by Republican radicalism and Democratic pettifogging in Congress.
33 March 30, 1860.
infuriate the southerners. The Republican press, a Democratic opponent charged, supports Lincoln but "ignores the Slavery question entirely, like the manager who advertised the play of Hamlet, with the part of Hamlet omitted."

Democratic embarrassment at their intra-party schism was accentuated by the events which transpired at their national convention held at Charleston in May. Although the Douglas delegates outnumbered their rivals, they lacked the requisite two-thirds majority for nominating the Illinois Senator. When William L. Yancey of Alabama led a bolt against the adopted pro-Douglas platform the split was complete. Most Democrats in the state were overwhelmingly in favor of Douglas' nomination as "the one Democratic candidate whom the Republicans fear." They considered his "long public services, his extensive experience and undoubted ability, his remarkable industry, strict integrity and perfect knowledge of the affairs of Government" sufficient to carry the northern states.

But Buchanan had his journalistic backers. The Pennsylvanian deplored the tendency to place "blind devotion to men" above "adherence to principle." In the view of another editor, Douglas' sponsorship of the controversial Kansas and Nebraska Bill in 1854 counted against him, since it was "the source of all the slavery agitation since that period." His bitter hostility to the President "and his extraordinary departure from Democratic usages" made it impossible for Democrats to give him their support. Republican editors in their turn gleefully explained that at Charleston "the South was too strong on the one hand, and the partisans of Douglas too indiscreet and windy in their zeal on the other." One Opposition editor saw in the debacle at Charleston a lesson for the Republicans soon to convene at Chicago. Under no conditions, he asserted, could the Republican delegates afford to name a candidate whose chief appeal was sectional.

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34 January 18, 1860.
37 The Pennsylvanian, June 25, 1860; Wilkes Barre Luzerne Union, July 18, 1860; Lewistown True Democrat, May 15, 1860.
In June the Douglas Democrats of the nation held a meeting at Baltimore to place the name of the Illinois Senator before the electorate. While administration journals sniffed, and Opposition editors scoffed at the divided Democracy "shivering in the wind and lamenting," the majority of Pennsylvania Democratic editors hailed Douglas as "the great representative man of the age among American Democracy." An upstate editor of Democratic persuasion put his finger on the party's dilemma: "Language fails us adequately to express our deep and heart-felt sorrow because of the present divided condition of the old time-honored Democracy."  

In the meantime the political scene in Pennsylvania revealed Simon Cameron laboring assiduously to control the state's Republican delegation to the Chicago convention. The Erie Dispatch reported long before the campaign began that Cameron had secured the endorsement of four-fifths of the party press in Pennsylvania.  

The story of the part played by the Pennsylvania delegation in swinging the Chicago convention to Abraham Lincoln is too familiar to require retelling here. Lincoln's managers had paved the way for this development by publicizing their candidate's merits in the state during the previous year. "Is there any man who could suit Pennsylvania better?" Joseph Medill had asked of Pennsylvania Republicans early in 1859. Jesse Fell, an early Lincoln backer, saw to it that a Lincoln autobiographical sketch appeared in the Chester County Times, from which it was widely reprinted.  

Pennsylvania's party press divided sharply on partisan lines in its reaction to Lincoln's nomination at Chicago. Republican journals greeted him as a "Henry Clay Whig," and an "advocate of Protection to American industry," a man "who can make rails and maul Democrats." He was "the idol of the Northwest" who  


79 Lee F. Crippen, Simon Cameron: Ante-Bellum Years (Oxford, Ohio, 1942), 206. Among the early pro-Cameron newspapers were the Pittsburgh Gazette, Harrisburg Telegraph, Greensburg Herald, Lancaster Examiner, and Philadelphia Evening Bulletin.  

80 Luthin, "Pennsylvania and Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency," op. cit., 63. Monaghan, op. cit., 140. This sketch was employed to emphasize Lincoln's Quaker antecedents.
will sweep that section while his running mate, Hannibal Hamlin of Maine will take care of the New England vote.\textsuperscript{42} Although Cameron, as one editor observed, was the first choice of Pennsylvania Republicans, he predicted that Lincoln would certainly carry the state in November. Another reported that only two or three of the Opposition papers in Pennsylvania opposed Lincoln's nomination while 159 had raised his name to their mastheads.\textsuperscript{43} All in all, Republicans throughout the nation and in Pennsylvania were able to close ranks behind a single presidential nominee.

Democratic journalists moved quickly to identify the Chicago nominee with the radical branch of his party. "A ultra of the ultraist kind on abolition . . . his speeches show sentiments more dangerous than any ever enunciated by Seward." How could he swear to support the constitution, another anti-Lincoln journal wondered, if he disregards the Supreme Court's decision in the Dred Scott case? He was "a Black Republican of the Seward 'irrepressible conflict' stamp."\textsuperscript{44} To expose Lincoln's basic radicalism "we need only to quote from these harangues (the house divided speech and others)."\textsuperscript{45} Forney's \textit{Press}, however, saw in Lincoln's nomination a warning to Democrats to unite behind Douglas, "else Mr. Lincoln will sweep Illinois, Indiana, and the whole North-West."\textsuperscript{46}

In the newspaper debate which followed, Douglas appears to have received more columnar space in the press of the nation than did any of the three other candidates.\textsuperscript{47} Without adequate financial backing, he tried desperately to woo Pennsylvania voters with a tardy endorsement of the protective tariff.\textsuperscript{48} His newspaper supporters argued that Buchanan's candidate, Breckinridge, repre-


\textsuperscript{43} Harrisburg \textit{Telegraph}, May 21, 1860; Pittsburgh \textit{Gazette}, June 5, 1860. Other Lincoln enthusiasts included the Lancaster \textit{Express}, Gettysburg \textit{Sentinel}, and Altoona \textit{Tribune}, although the \textit{Tribune} (May 24, 1860) considered Hamlin the better man.

\textsuperscript{44} Lebanon \textit{Advertiser}, May 23, 1850; Carlisle \textit{American Volunteer}, May 24, 30, 1860; Gettysburg \textit{Compiler}, May 21, 1860.

\textsuperscript{45} Philadelphia \textit{Evening Journal}, cited in Harper, \textit{op. cit.}, 57. The \textit{Evening Journal} was a Know Nothing organ that eventually endorsed the Constitutional Union ticket of John Bell and Edward Everett.

\textsuperscript{46} Cited in Harper, \textit{op. cit.}, 57.

\textsuperscript{47} Fite, \textit{op. cit.}, 205.

\textsuperscript{48} Luthin, "Pennsylvania and Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency," \textit{op. cit.}, 77.
sented southern sectionalism and that the Republicans represented northern sectionalism, "while the National [Douglas] Democracy was trying to elect a President for the whole Union." The Philadelphia *North American*, whose commercial orientation had won for it the nickname of "Philadelphia's counting-house organ," held for Lincoln on the grounds that only he could be elected outside the House of Representatives and that a prolonged and bitter struggle in that body could serve only to further exacerbate sectional feeling and disturb "economic tranquility."  

Neither Republicans nor Democrats welcomed the advent of the Constitutional Union Party into the 1860 campaign. Although the party held a state convention at Lancaster in April, it failed to nominate a gubernatorial candidate, preferring apparently to rely on its national ticket to draw the conservative vote. Without an effective state organization it had little chance for success, although the *North American's* Morton McMichael had entertained a hope that the Republicans at Chicago might accept John Bell, its presidential nominee, as a compromise candidate. After Alexander Cummings, Jr., withdrew as editor of the Philadelphia *Evening Bulletin* in the spring of 1860, that journal flirted for a brief time with the Constitutional Unionists. Eventually, however, the *Evening Bulletin* joined the Lincoln camp. Republican newspapers dismissed the Bell-Everett state convention as consisting merely of "self-appointed members . . . representing a few disgruntled politicians." The Democrats admitted that the Lancaster assembly was "harmonious and dignified," but also regarded it as "fossiliferous." 

Pennsylvania Democrats were not blind to the need for some semblance of party unity if they were to prevail in the October elections. Consequently, the Democratic State Committee met in Philadelphia on July 2 and recommended that the party faithful act as a unit in the state and local contests. With respect to the  

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49 Pittsburgh *Daily Post*, November 2, 1860.  
50 *November 6, 1860.*  
51 Davis, *op. cit.*, 95. See also correspondence of James E. Harvey to John Bell, August 6, 1860, Polk-Yeatman Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.  
53 Pittsburgh *Gazette*, May 16, 1860; Pittsburgh *Daily Post*, May 12, 1860; *The Pennsylvanian*, May 11, 1860; Bedford *Gazette*, May 18, 1860. The Bell-Everett party, says Allan Nevins (*op. cit.*, II, 262) "had intellectual distinction and inspired general respect, but no enthusiasm."
national campaign, the Committee proposed that Democrats support the electoral ticket already chosen at Reading in February; that this ticket be given either to Douglas or Breckinridge, depending on which could be elected in the electoral college; and if neither could be so chosen Pennsylvania's electoral vote be divided between them in ratio to their popular vote in the state. This naturally presupposed that the Democrats would carry Pennsylvania.54

At first the party press was skeptical of this plan. The Pittsburgh Daily Post insisted that only a state convention could make such a decision.55 Other Douglas organs balked in the belief that such a compromise would constitute an acknowledgment of "the right of a factious minority to dictate their own terms of cooperation." James Buchanan thereupon threw what influence he had behind the proposal:

The main object of all good Democrats [Buchanan wrote] whether belonging to one or the other wing of our unfortunate division, is to defeat the election of the Republican candidates; and I shall never oppose any honest course calculated to accomplish this object.56

The obstacle over which this fusion movement foundered was John W. Forney and his Philadelphia Press. From first to last this influential journal would have no truck with compromise. "No true friend of Douglas, in Pennsylvania or elsewhere, can touch an electoral ticket which contains upon it the single name of a Breckinridge Disunionist," declared the Press.57 Douglas himself did not favor fusion movements, and from this Forney may have taken his cue. But when this was reported the Pittsburgh Daily Post rejoined that neither Douglas nor Forney knew what was best for Pennsylvania Democrats.58

Forney's refusal to join in the common cause against Lincoln was probably based on more devious reasons than mere hostility to the Breckinridge ticket. Since his election in January, 1860, as Clerk of the House at Washington by a coalition of Republicans

54 Davis, op. cit., 107-108. Similar proposals were made in New York and New Jersey.
55 July 4, 18, 1860.
56 Cited in Philadelphia Public Ledger, July 12, 1860.
57 Cited in Luthin, The First Lincoln Campaign, 204.
58 September 9, 1860.
and anti-Lecompton Democrats, he had been savagely assailed in the Democratic press. They blamed the crushing defeat in the 1859 state elections on Forney's break with the Buchanan administration, and his selection to this clerkship, they stated, was in line with the usual Republican principle—"the greater the fraud the greater the honor." As the property of the Republican party "he will prove a useful instrument as long as he is well rewarded." Appeals were made to Philadelphia merchants to repudiate the advertising columns of the *Press* lest it lose them their southern trade. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that Forney could not at this time easily cooperate with his furious editorial critics.

At all events, the *Press* published the Douglas National Committee's call for a meeting of all-out Douglas supporters at Harrisburg to decide upon a course of action. This convention ratified Foster's nomination, but called for a reconsideration of the proposed fusion ticket. Not completely discouraged by the intransigence of the die-hard Douglasites, the Democratic State Committee reconvened at Cresson on August 9, offered a modification of the proposal made at Philadelphia five weeks earlier, and hopefully urged Pennsylvania Democrats to give the fusion ticket their wholehearted support.

Anxiously grabbing at straws, most Democratic editors accepted the "Cresson Compromise." "We shall sustain it," James P. Barr declared, "because we believe it will bring out the largest Democratic vote which the State ever cast." He pleaded with hard-shelled Douglasites "to bury their pride of opinion and personal preference and go heart and hand for the common cause." But such inducements failed to impress Forney. He shortly published in the *Press* a report that straight-out Douglas men had formed their own electoral ticket and in a long editorial he urged Democrats to support it.

The widening gap between Forney and his erstwhile party col-

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30 Davis, *op. cit.*, 110-112. This arrangement would permit Pennsylvania's presidential electors, if the Democrats won the state, to cast their vote "for any man running for President claiming to be a Democrat," or for whichever Democrat carried the state.

61 Philadelphia *Press*, September 12, 1860. The Pittsburgh *Evening Chronicle* explained that straight-out Douglas men resented the dictation of Senator William Bigler "through his organ [the *Patriot and Union*] at Harrisburg long before the Committee met." See issue of August 10, 1860.
leagues, even the moderate Douglas adherents, is reflected in the
glorous assaults made upon him in the columns of Barr’s *Daily
Post*. Forney’s course, Barr charged, was dictated by his effort
to purchase a seat in the United States Senate with Republican
assistance. He was merely fulfilling his contract with the Black
Republicans by serving the Lincoln candidacy. “No true friend of
Douglas,” the *Daily Post* insisted, “can favor what is in fact a
Bolter’s ticket.” There is considerable evidence that Barr cor-
correctly assessed the meaning of Forney’s stubborn refusal to accept
the compromise. Years later the editor of the *Press* admitted
as much.62

Devoid of vote-getting state issues and overshadowed by the
national contest, Pennsylvania’s gubernatorial campaign soon
descended to a shabby discussion of personalities. James Buchanan
had the unhappy experience of seeing himself pilloried as a cor-
ruptionist and pro-slavery instrument, not only by the Opposition
press but by the majority of his own party journals.63 Perhaps the
most damaging blows to his prestige were the revelations of the
Covode Committee, headed by a Pennsylvania Republican con-
gressman. In March this congressional body began an investiga-
tion into charges of corruption within the Buchanan admistra-
tion. Enough was disclosed to show that Buchanan or his
subordinates had subsidized with government printing contracts
two of his Philadelphia newspaper supporters, the *Argus* and *The
Pennsylvanian*.64 Forney himself testified before the Committee
that contracts were denied him when he refused to endorse the
President’s Kansas policy.65

Democratic editors loyal to Buchanan squirmed under the
charges. While Forney’s *Press* asserted that the disclosures justified
its editorial policy since 1857, others attributed the investigation
to “personal malignity” and the Republican principle of “set a

62 “I had done my utmost to elect him [Lincoln] . . . by the only way in
my power,” wrote Forney in 1881, “and that was by supporting the straight
Douglas electoral ticket in Pennsylvania.” See Forney’s *Anecdotes of Public
Men* (New York, 1873-1881), II, 421-422.

63 The decline and eventual collapse of *The Pennsylvanian* indicates the
waning strength of Buchanan in the state. None of the prominent newspapers
in Lancaster County, Buchanan’s home, supported his candidate for the

64 Fite, *op. cit.*, 134-135.

65 Luthin, “The Democratic Split During Buchanan’s Administration,”
*Pennsylvania History*, XI (1944), 22.
thief to watch a thief.” This “Smelling Committee” illustrated “the depths to which partisan malignity can descend.” Nevertheless, the Covode Committee’s report became “the political textbook of the Republican Party” in Pennsylvania and Democrats redoubled their efforts to see to it that John Covode was not returned to Congress.

Republican prospects mounted as Democratic embarrassment increased. “The Democracy is scattered like sheep without a shepherd,” grumbled one Democratic editor. Another blamed the discouraging prospect on platforms. “Before platforms were thought of,” he wrote, “the party was always united and triumphant.”

Foster’s anomalous position as the gubernatorial candidate of a divided party provided his opponents with a golden opportunity. Even though they admitted that he was personally honest and sincere, they predicted that “his easy and confiding nature would place him in the hands of selfish men,” like perhaps Senator William Bigler who was charged with bringing in a $100,000 “corruption fund” to buy Pennsylvania votes.

Desperate Democratic editors levelled a barrage of vituperation and invective on Andrew G. Curtin. He was labelled “a barroom politician who has few superiors . . . as a teller of smutty anecdotes.” He regarded Pennsylvania Germans as “thick skulled.” Even the religious issue was invoked, albeit with disarming inconsistency. One anti-Curtin editor declared that the Republican nominee’s sole claim to prominence was in the fact that he was “pitch-forked into public notoriety by the Know Nothing organization in 1854,” while another reported a story that he was secretly an Irish Catholic “with many priests as blood relatives.”

The Curtin press vigorously denied these charges, and warned...

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66 Pittsburgh Daily Post, March 13, 1860; Gettysburg Compiler, April 9, 1860; Philadelphia Public Ledger, March 20, 1860; Lebanon Advertiser, June 20, 1860.
67 McClure, Old Time Notes, I, 393; Myers, op. cit., 244.
68 Lewistown True Democrat, May 4, 1860; Wilkes-Barre Luzerne Union, May 2, 1860.
69 Shippensburg News, July 21, 1860; Pittsburgh Gazette, September 20, 1860.
70 Gettysburg Compiler, March 26, 1860; Pittsburgh Daily Post, March 9, 1860; Lebanon Advertiser, August 29, 1860. Although the charge of Know Nothingism had more substance as far as Curtin was concerned, it was the “Irish Catholic” accusation that bothered the Republicans. A. K. McClure thought enough of it to obtain an affidavit from the Presbyterian minister who had baptized Curtin. See Old Time Notes, II, 421.
that if the Democrats did not put a stop to such slander "a volume of rich exposures about his [Foster's] private affairs and pecuniary transactions" would be forthcoming. Roman Catholic priests, one editor assured his readers, were denouncing Curtin to their flocks as a bitter enemy of the Church.71

Despite the earnest protestations of Pennsylvania Democrats to the contrary, as the state campaign drew to a close defeat stared them in the face. On the eve of the balloting their newspapers were divided into three mutually hostile camps. Some, like The Pennsylvanian, still bore aloft the Buchanan-Breckinridge banner, although it had supported the Cresson fusion arrangement. Others, like the Pittsburgh Daily Post, fought the good fight for Douglas while denouncing Breckinridge and Lincoln with equal impartiality. A distinct minority, like Forney's Press, sniped away incessantly at the administration. Scornful Republican organs endeavored to add to Democratic bewilderment with regular reports of "sell-outs" on the part of the "Split Tailed Democracy."

The results of the October elections spelled disaster for Democrats of whatever faction. So impressive were the Opposition victories that the Pittsburgh Gazette was impelled to warn of Republican over-confidence in the remainder of the campaign.72 In addition to Curtin's unprecedented 32,000 majority, the Republicans captured eighteen of the twenty-five congressional seats, ten of the twelve contests for the state Senate, and seventy-one of the 100 seats in the state House of Representatives.73 It is unlikely, however, that Democratic division was the sole explanation for Republican success. Eighteen-sixty merely culminated a five-year trend of Democratic ineptitude in the face of Opposition youth and zeal.

Democratic editorial post mortems credited Forney with responsibility for their party's catastrophe. The Press "lays down the law for straight out Douglasism in Pennsylvania [which] . . . is Lincolnism in disguise," The Pennsylvanian charged. The Lebanon Advertiser was perhaps more perspicacious, blaming the outcome on voter mistrust of Democratic tariff promises, a general belief that the party was pro-slavery, and "tribes of land and homes

71 Pittsburgh Dispatch, September 14, 1860; Greensburg Herald, September 12, 1860; Pittsburgh Gazette, August 28, 1860.
72 October 22, 1860.
73 Davis, op. cit., 131.
held out to the ignorant.” Forney was ready with his own explanation:

Nearly everything calculated to promote General Foster’s election was left undone, and nearly everything which the [state] Committee could possibly do to secure his defeat was faithfully attended to. The campaign was characterized by inefficiency, imbecility, and stupid blundering.

Foster himself was not blameless, continued the Press, since his silence on the national candidates and issues had won him cordial support “in no section of the Democratic party.”

Philadelphia had gone Democratic by a few hundred votes, a fact from which Democrats drew some solace and led the North American to complain that “our dear city is at odds with the true interests of herself, the state, and the nation.” But the October results took much of the steam out of the presidential race in Pennsylvania. “We never saw an election for even ward officers,” one Philadelphia newspaper reported, “that excited so little interest.” Democrats were naturally disheartened. “If the Democratic and conservative vote . . . when generally united could not elect Foster,” a Pittsburgh editor sadly observed, “it seems hopeless to attempt to defeat Lincoln in the State in November.”

At the other end of the commonwealth, The Pennsylvanian was not yet ready to throw in the towel. “It is all a mistake to suppose that . . . because she [Pennsylvania] elected Curtin governor she must necessarily go for Lincoln in the presidential contest.” In an effort to rally flagging spirits an upstate weekly appealed to Democrats. “If our success was certain, we might spare your vote, but under the circumstances,” the editor urged, “we need it and must have it.” Most Pennsylvanians, however, would have agreed with Douglas, who on hearing of the impressive Republican vic-

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74 The Pennsylvanian, October 11, 1860; Lebanon Advertiser, October 17, 1860.
75 Philadelphia Press, October 10, 13, 1860.
76 Philadelphia North American, October 13, 1860.
78 Pittsburgh Daily Post, October 15, 1860.
79 October 12, 1860.
80 Gettysburg Compiler, October 22, 1860.
tories in Pennsylvania and Indiana, summed up the situation succinctly: "Mr. Lincoln is the next President."\(^{81}\)

That Lincoln might improve on the Curtin majority was considered likely, but even Republicans were astonished at the 60,000 vote margin which he polled. After the intense battle for the state offices, Lincoln’s vote came almost as an anti-climax. A contemporary evaluation of the significance of the outcome probably hits as close to the truth as has later commentary. In a post-election editorial in November the Philadelphia *North American* denied that “it is either a triumph of the north over the south, or of any sectional aspect of the slavery question.” The dominating factor, said the *North American*, was “the purpose to change . . . and to purge and purify the whole political machinery of government.” Pennsylvania, particularly, “demanded that the principle of protecting American industry should be recognized and avowed.” This was the question which “entered largely into our local contest, and was everywhere avowed.” Finally:

> There is a vast difference between . . . the candidate for the Presidency and the President of the Union. One represents the party, the other a nation in its unity and without regard to section.\(^{82}\)

Disheartened and disgruntled Democrats, North, South, and in Pennsylvania might draw what comfort they could from such reassurances. Perhaps few Pennsylvanians of either party were aware, however, that the 1860 election was to mark the beginning of a long period of political drought for Democrats in this state.

\(^{81}\) Cited in Nevins, *op. cit.*, II, 295.

\(^{82}\) November 7, 1860.