



ANDREW W. MELLON

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THE MELLONS, THEIR MONEY, AND THE MYTHICAL MACHINE: ORGANIZATIONAL POLITICS IN THE REPUBLICAN TWENTIES

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DURING the winter of 1927-28 reporters harried William Larimer Mellon, chairman of the Republican state committee and nephew of Secretary of the Treasury Andrew W. Mellon, as to whom he, his uncle, and their cohorts intended to endorse in the spring senatorial primary. Annoyed by their persistence, he parried the questions by challenging the assumption that there was a Mellon machine which could dictate electoral verdicts. "What I would like to know," he asked incredulously, "is who and what is the Mellon organization."¹

But W. L. Mellon's disclaimer fell upon deaf ears. Observers of all persuasions who followed Keystone state politics in the 1920s were firmly convinced that there indeed was a Mellon organization or Mellon machine. Purportedly headquartered in Pittsburgh but directed from Washington, this well financed machine was believed to dominate, in part if not in full, the steel city and state GOP organizations for over a decade. Journalists regularly reported its activities, invariably touting its strength and influence. Opponents persistently excoriated it as a means for coalescing support. So pervasive and persuasive was the credence accorded the Mellon machine that historians and others over the last fifty years have generally subscribed to the same tenet.²

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¹*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 1, 1928.

²Harvey O'Connor, *Mellon's Millions, The Biography of a Fortune, The Life and Times of Andrew W. Mellon* (New York, 1933), 256-271; Sylvester K. Stevens, *Pennsylvania, Birthplace of a Nation* (New York, 1964), 280; Bruce Stave, *The New Deal and the Last Hurrah* (Pittsburgh, 1970), 25-28; Philip S. Klein and Ari Hoogenboom, *A History of Pennsylvania* (New York, 1973), 404, 405, 408, 409; and Samuel J. Astorino, "The Decline and Fall of the Republican Dynasty in Pennsylvania, 1929-1934" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1962), 59, 66, 222. The only historian to question the veracity of the Mellon machine, and then with mixed emotions, was J. Roffe Wike who observed that "the great difficulty with the so-called Mellon organization was that they were not able to control it effectively. By the end of the twenties, they were hardly able to exercise much control at all" *The Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association* (Philadelphia, 1960), 285.

Though I do not doubt that the Mellon family wielded considerable political influence in Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania in the 1920s, and while they may have intended or wished to transcend the influence stage through the aegis of a machine, I am skeptical as to whether a Mellon machine ever existed in anything but the hyperactive imaginations of people who were so accustomed to machine politics that they identified any political grouping as a machine. The following is an effort to analyze the partisan political affairs of A. W. Mellon and his family in the post-World War I period and to determine if their operations included the formation and direction of a machine.³

Prior to Andrew W. Mellon's assumption of the treasury portfolio in 1921, the Mellons had been essentially apolitical. They avoided overt activities such as public endorsements and campaigning; and only the patriarch, Thomas, ever held office, one term on the common pleas bench in Allegheny County from 1859 to 1869. Contemporaneous of the new breed of politician which was populating industrial America, the judge and his sons followed the same path trod by most of their peers, from the arena of public affairs to the countinghouse, market place, and factory. For nearly fifty years the family adhered to A. W.'s maxim that it "was always a mistake for a good businessman to take public office."⁴

While eschewing the visible world of politics, the Mellons did not ignore public affairs, especially as they affected their myriad of investments. Several members of the family and their business associates belonged to the Civic Club of Pittsburgh, one of the principal reform organizations in their hometown, and the same individuals were instrumental in the formation of the Citizen's Committee on the City Plan, "the chief vehicle through which businessmen attempted to influence the physical environment" of the steel city. Both of these organizations were progressive era good government

³H. Sheldon Parker, Jr., "The State of Allegheny: The Republican Party in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County from 1930 to 1961" (Pittsburgh, unpublished manuscript, 1961), 3. This writer defines a political machine as a group of individuals, working in concert, who control a party organization and thus some level of government by virtue of voter support exchanged for favors, and who are capable of perpetuating control by determining the outcome of elections. The essence of a machine in the final analysis is its ability to deliver votes for its chosen candidates. Edward Banfield and James Q. Wilson have summarized that essence in terms A. W. Mellon would have admired; "A political machine is a business organization in a particular field of business—getting votes and winning elections." *City Politics* (Cambridge, 1963), 115.

⁴Thomas Mellon, *Thomas Mellon and His Times* (Pittsburgh, 1885), 357, 394-407, 535-541, and quoted in George Harvey, *Henry Clay Frick, The Man* (New York, 1928), 186.

associations which businessmen utilized to exert influence in a community with a tradition of boss government. A. W. also served during World War I on the State Committee of Public Safety, an executive group of twenty distinguished individuals chaired by George Wharton Pepper.⁵

More important than membership in civic improvement groups was the function of party benefactors which the Mellons assumed. A. W. was reputed to have been a generous supporter of the state GOP machine of Senators Matthew Quay and Boies Penrose, and he and his brother, Richard Beatty Mellon, are reported to have contributed \$2,500 each to Republican coffers in 1912 and again in 1916. In the struggle of Senator Philander Chase Knox and the irreconcilables against the League of Nations, A. W. and his closest friend, Henry Clay Frick, supposedly gave \$10,000 apiece to sustain the battle. Given his intense personal and business relationships with Knox and Frick, and his reputation for acting in concert with these two politically active personages, A. W. might well have financially participated in other worthy causes. On the local level, William Flinn, turn of the century boss of Pittsburgh with Christopher Magee, was a partner of the Mellons in the Gulf Oil Corporation, and one would assume that the family offered at least occasional financial support in municipal campaigns. Significantly, these and other stories of the Mellons acting as political fat cats were virtually unknown to the general public until A. W. became a cabinet officer.⁶

The half century family tradition of treading cautiously and surreptitiously about the political world began to crumble in 1920. Having lost his incentive "to pile up money" and attracted to public service, A. W. emerged from his political cocoon by serving as a delegate-at-large to the Republican National Convention which nominated Warren G. Harding. He found the capacity of incipient politician congenial and participated in the campaign as both contributor and fund raiser, collecting \$150,000 for the GOP ticket

⁵Samuel P. Hays, "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, LV (October, 1964), 160, and a letter from Professor Hays in the author's possession, November 20, 1970; Roy Lubove, *Twentieth Century Pittsburgh: Government, Business, and Environmental Change* (Pittsburgh, 1969), 187; Lorin Peterson, *The Day of the Mugwump* (New York, 1961), 280-281; and G. W. Pepper, *Philadelphia Lawyer, An Autobiography* (Philadelphia, 1944), 115.

⁶Klein and Hoogenboom, *Pennsylvania*, 397; Ferdinand Lundberg, *Americas Sixty Families* (New York, 1937), 108, 131; Harvey, *Frick*, 324-326; Allan Nevins, "Andrew W. Mellon," *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York, 1958), XXII, Supplement Two, 446-452; and Sidney Swensrud, *Gulf Oil, The First Fifty Years, 1901-1951* (New York, 1951), 9. See also Frank Kent, "Fat Cats and Free Rides," *American Mercury*, XIV (June, 1928), 131-132.

from his friends and business acquaintances. Enamored with the potential prestige and glamour of public life, A. W. was easily persuaded to continue his metamorphosis by joining the new administration as secretary of the treasury.⁷

Becoming a cabinet member, an appointive office, did not in any way mean that A. W. intended to become a full-fledged politician in the sense of embroiling himself or his family in electoral politics. As he had no particular financial programs in mind, neither did he have any plans for active or enduring partisan involvement, let alone forming and directing a machine of his own. His scheme was to spend four years in Washington caring for the nation's finances and reaping the rewards of popular acclaim as a prelude to retirement. Implicit in his decision to become treasury secretary was recognition of the reality that political affairs in Pennsylvania would continue under the tutelage of the senior Republican senator, Boies Penrose. Indeed, indications are that A. W. not only acceded to that arrangement but preferred it. His investment policy of leaving direct management in the hands of those more knowledgeable, skilled, and experienced adapted well to the political world. Personal involvement came only as a last resort when one's intermediaries failed.⁸

A. W.'s best intentions to concentrate on the nation's financial affairs and to pursue his developing tax program while leaving political matters in the adroit hands of Penrose went awry in a matter of months. On Columbus Day, 1921, Senator P. C. Knox, a vital link for A. W. to the political world, collapsed and died. Ten weeks later Penrose also died, leaving A. W. in the uncomfortable position of ranking Pennsylvania Republican on the national level. Concerned as to whom would succeed, the secretary endeavored to make his wishes known to Governor William C. Sproul, but he was ignored. His political strength was drawn largely from his relationships with the two senators, and that strength died with them. If he expected to be more than a figurehead with a modicum of in-

⁷*Pittsburgh Dispatch*, May 22, 1921; *New York Times*, February 5, 1932; Phillip H. Love, *Andrew W. Mellon, The Man and His Work* (Baltimore, 1929), 33-34; and United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Public Lands and Surveys, *Leases Upon Naval Oil Reserves, Hearings, 70th Cong., 1st Sess.* (Washington, D.C., 1928), 550-551. For the machinations which led to A. W.'s acceptance of the treasury post, see Lawrence L. Murray, "Andrew W. Mellon, The Reluctant Candidate," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, XCVII (October, 1973), 511-531.

⁸*New York Times*, February 5, 1932; and John K. Barnes, "What Manner of Man is Mellon," *Worlds Work*, XLVII (March, 1924), 542.

fluence drawn from treasury patronage and campaign financing, it would be necessary to fashion a new power base.⁹

The decision to abrogate the role of figurehead and to immerse himself in the political world emanated from A. W.'s problems as secretary of the treasury, not from a desire to be a power broker. Though the Republicans had overwhelming majorities in both houses of Congress, the secretary experienced intense difficulty in gaining assent to various proposals. As chairman of the crucial finance committee, Penrose had operated as the treasury spokesman, and Knox had cooperated when legislation reached the floor. With his erstwhile champions gone, A. W. was most concerned that their successors perform comparable service. For the next decade A. W. would consistently evaluate his political stance from the vantage point of the treasury. Though he would become enmeshed in politics on the national, state, and local level, all decisions would be made in accordance with how they would best expedite his work in Washington. Unlike Penrose, William S. Vare, and other political animals, he never cultivated an interest in partisan matters simply to participate in the exercise and manipulation of power. For A. W., political power, like money, was not an end in itself; it was a means, a means for achieving his programs as secretary of the treasury.

Stung by having been ignored and overlooked in the senatorial nominations of William E. Crow and George Wharton Pepper, A. W. undertook some political overtures of his own. The first indication that he was rising from a moribund state was the designation of his nephew, William Larimer Mellon, as his political alter ego. The president of Gulf Oil Corporation, W. L. had had some experience in party operations, and he would soon become a driving force. As secretary of the treasury and as a political neophyte accustomed to relying on the sagacity of a Frick or a Penrose, A. W. had neither the time nor the skill to pursue partisan matters. He adhered to his normal business routine of appointing a competent surrogate.¹⁰

A second illustration of increasing involvement by A. W., though not immediately recognized as such, was the report that David A.

⁹*Pittsburgh Leader*, October 17, 1921; *Pittsburgh Post*, October 14-18, 21, 1921, January 8-10, 1922; and E. J. Stackpole, *Behind the Scenes with a Newspaper Man* (Philadelphia, 1927), 128.

¹⁰W. L. Mellon, *Judge Mellon's Sons* (Pittsburgh, 1948), 439; United States, Congress, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures in Senatorial Primary and General Elections, *Hearings, 69th Congress, 1st session* (Washington, D.C., 1926), 154.

Reed was circulating nominating petitions for a primary challenge to the ill and periodically hospitalized Crow. Politically unknown, Reed was the law partner and son of Judge James H. Reed, onetime colleague of P. C. Knox, intimate of A. W.'s and the secretary's original preference to succeed Knox. Though the younger Reed denied that his candidacy was involved with any faction, his subsequent career as a Mellon protégé suggests that his decision to enter politics was not entirely his own.¹¹

The death of Penrose, who had groomed no heir, ignited a frantic struggle for succession among a half dozen or more factions. That struggle was exacerbated by Crow's refusal to retire, Reed's entrance, the consternation of the Vare brothers and the Philadelphia machine at having been ignored in the nomination of Pepper, and maverick Republican Gifford Pinchot's decision to challenge the regulars for the gubernatorial nomination. With no semblance of a boss who could dictate, the contending groups initiated a technique which would become a common practice in state Republican circles for many years to come. A conference was to be held in Philadelphia in early April, 1922, for purposes of negotiating a harmony ticket, the equitable distribution of offices.

Compromise reigned as each clique bargained for a share of the spoils. More concerned as always with the national rather than the state scene, the Mellons, led by W. L. and assisted by Pittsburgh boss Max G. Leslie, negotiated Crow into retirement in favor of Reed who would run in tandem with Pepper for the unexpired terms. Though little known to the Pittsburgh contingent before his elevation, the Philadelphia lawyer had proven in his short service to be perfectly acceptable, and the designation of Reed meant that the steel city would maintain control over what it considered its senate seat. In exchange for concessions from the Philadelphia politicians on national offices, the westerners endorsed the eastern wing's nominees for governor, lieutenant governor, and state party chairman. The only potentate dissatisfied was Joseph R. Grundy, president of the Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association. He was a bitter enemy of the Vares. But like them, he showed more interest in state than national politics despite his reputation concerning the tariff. Grundy balked at the gubernatorial compromise and bolted

¹¹*Pittsburgh Post*, March 17-20, 28, 1922. As to the David Reed-Mellon relationship, Silas Bent has written that when Reed was in the upper chamber, it was "as near cabinet representation on the legislative floor as anything we have seen in this country." *Strange Bedfellows, A Review of Politics, Personalities, and the Press* (New York, 1928), 73.

the regular organization to support the independent candidacy of Gifford Pinchot.¹²

Having minimized contentiousness, the regulars entered the primary confident. The two senatorial candidates easily bested their nominal opposition. But Pinchot eked out a narrow victory, a margin of 15,000 in a canvass that drew a million votes. Pinchot's victory was attributed to a number of factors, women and progressives, he said, but the light turnout in urban areas, particularly Allegheny County where only one-half the registrants voted, was probably more significant.¹³

The Mellons accomplished their goal, the election of Reed and Pepper. In that regard their baptism in participation politics was a success. Yet that achievement came not from the application of electoral muscle generated by an organized machine. It came through delicate negotiations with power brokers who were willing to cooperate with a politically unknown quantity and to defer to A. W.'s cabinet position. Failure to deliver their home county in the gubernatorial contest and their inability to produce votes in W. Harry Baker's successful drive for the state chairmanship, however, bred suspicion and did not augur well for future cooperation and deference. The Vare brothers were disturbed at the lack of access to the principal elected offices. Given the fact that the Philadelphia Republican turnout was generally almost as large as that of Allegheny and all of the other counties combined, there was serious reason to question the likelihood of future coalitions. If the Mellons expected to continue participating in state politics on a par with other brokers, it was imperative that they develop a capacity for delivering ballots when needed. Their negotiating ability in 1922 party councils had been derived from a fear of the unknown.

Peace and harmony were the keynotes of 1923 for it was not an election year. From A. W.'s perspective, it was a planning period. He and his staff at the treasury were preparing to approach Congress for a second time with their plans for major income tax reductions, especially in the higher brackets of the surtax. Though the national legislature had large GOP majorities in both houses, a coalition of insurgent Republicans and Democrats had stymied the secretary before and promised to do so again. Expecting only a partial victory

¹²*Pittsburgh Post and Pittsburgh Leader*, March 29-April 8, 13-14, 1922; M. Nelson McGeary, *Gifford Pinchot, Forester-Politician* (Princeton, 1960), 178-187; Wike, *Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association*, 225-226.

¹³*Pittsburgh Post and Pittsburgh Leader*, May 18-20, 1922.

comparable to that gained in 1921, A. W. altered his thinking about a four-year term and planned to continue in office until he gained complete congressional assent to his program for "scientific" tax reduction. His intentions to continue in office were further stimulated by the succession to the presidency in August, 1923, of Calvin Coolidge, an ideological compatriot. Coincident with his planning for an assault on Congress, A. W. was laying the groundwork for unifying the state party in anticipation of the national conclave in 1924. He was anxious to have Pennsylvania Republicans solidly behind Coolidge at the convention and to have his home state exceed its record shattering GOP majority of 1920. If successful, A. W.'s desire to remain in the Coolidge administration would be enhanced.¹⁴

Because there were no statewide offices at stake and because Coolidge was certain to be nominated, none of the party luminaries, save Governor Pinchot, was averse to A. W.'s inclinations. Always an irregular, the governor was thought to be interested in controlling the state delegation as a nucleus for a presidential bid. Hoping to avoid a rupture within the party, A. W.'s first instinct was not to fight, but to compromise. Assisted by W. L., Senators Reed and Pepper, and Chairman Baker, A. W. and Pinchot negotiated an agreement whereby the governor deferred his presidential aspirations in exchange for an uninstructed delegation and no opposition to his candidacy for delegate-at-large. The regulars were not particularly happy with the concessions to the governor, but since they had no direct investment, they were willing to accede to the secretary's wishes.¹⁵

The secretary's hopes for a *modus vivendi* were dashed in a matter of weeks as Pinchot, a fanatical prohibitionist, launched a tirade against federal enforcement. He urged that Francis J. Heney become special counsel to the Senate Select Committee on the Investigation of the Bureau of Internal Revenue. Because the Prohibition Bureau and the Bureau of Internal Revenue were responsibilities of the treasury department, A. W. interpreted the governor's actions as complicity in efforts by his enemies to remove him from office. Word went out from state party headquarters to "Get the Governor!" and Pinchot was defeated in his race for delegate-at-large. A. W. then led a delegation instructed for Coolidge to the convention. Yet it is important to note that A. W. employed diplo-

¹⁴For the secretary's ideas and plans concerning taxation, see A. W. Mellon, *Taxation; The People's Business* (New York, 1924).

¹⁵*Pittsburgh Post*, October 24-25, 1923, January 21-24, 1924.

macy and exhibited a willingness to sacrifice when he really did not have to do so. When he did move to crush the governor, his success was not a product of his own political power. It was a result of the standing, or lack thereof, which Pinchot had with the entire party organization.¹⁶

The zenith of A. W.'s partisan career occurred at the 1924 Republican convention in nearby Cleveland. His appearance at what was otherwise a dull, perfunctory opening day session was something of a sensation. By prior arrangement, the secretary was to offer a routine motion for creation of a resolutions committee. Hailed as "the greatest Secretary of the Treasury since Alexander Hamilton," the shy, diminutive banker was greeted by "the only spontaneous enthusiasm" that day. Prearrangements notwithstanding, a nervous and embarrassed man mounted the speaker's rostrum. Overcome by stage fright on his day of glory and "wringing to pieces" the paper on which the motion was written, A. W. spoke so inaudibly that a clerk had to reread the motion.¹⁷

Unlike the 1922 campaign which was localized and saw their senatorial candidates virtually unopposed, the Mellons personally involved themselves in the 1924 presidential race. W. L., who was briefly considered for GOP national treasurer, served as chief of the collection committee in the Pittsburgh district and worked with Joseph R. Grundy to raise \$620,000 in Pennsylvania. The secretary went on radio for a one-half hour national address, urging the electorate to vote for the "well tried economic principles" of the Republicans rather than the chimeric, "false Gods" of the Democrats. But occupied with his duties in Washington, D.C., he did not render the Coolidge-Dawes ticket the ultimate endorsement, his vote.¹⁸

Amidst Coolidge's landslide victory, the Republican margin in Pennsylvania dipped slightly, from 66 percent to 65 percent. The Democrats saw their losing percentage ebb substantially as the Progressive party gained from them and from new voters. Unlike the progressive gubernatorial candidate, Pinchot, who two years earlier found his greatest strength in the rural areas, Robert LaFollette marshaled most of his votes in the urban centers, especially Allegheny County where he received one-fourth of his total vote. The Republican vote in Mellons's home county dropped ten points to 59

¹⁶*Ibid.*, April 14-19, 1924; McGeary, *Pinchot*, 303-306.

¹⁷*Ibid.*; *Pittsburgh Press*, June 9-11, 1924; Mellon, *Mellon's Sons*, 439-443.

¹⁸*Pittsburgh Post and New York Times*, October 29, 1924; United States, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures, *Hearings*, 196-197.

percent as the Progressives accumulated 32 percent. Though they raised three times as much money as previously and personally campaigned for the first time, the Mellons were unable to generate the same degree of voter enthusiasm as in 1920 when they remained behind the scenes.¹⁹

Coolidge's victory was barely history when the Mellons turned their attention to Pittsburgh's 1925 mayoralty contest. Relatively oblivious as they were in 1921, the family had remained aloof during the last local election when state Senator Max G. Leslie sponsored the nomination and election of William A. Magee, nephew of the former boss. Their concern with the 1925 race, however, was not stimulated by a desire to exert political hegemony. Leslie had that and had proven amenable to compromise. The Mellons wished to avoid serious factionalism in anticipation of the 1926 senatorial race. The secretary was determined that Pepper, a staunch administration supporter but a lackluster, ineffectual campaigner, be re-elected. There was well grounded suspicion that he would be challenged by William S. Vare, sole proprietor of the Philadelphia machine since the death of his brother Edwin in 1922. Vare had not forgotten the gubernatorial setback of 1922 and his subsequent lack of access to the state's major offices.

The political situation in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County had thoroughly deteriorated in recent years as competing forces quarreled over patronage, a factor which no doubt contributed to the slumping Republican tallies in 1922 and 1924. Mayor Magee and Leslie had become bitter antagonists, and the boss sought to stymie the re-election of his former protégé. Wishing to avoid a confrontation which would leave the cliques embittered and uncooperative for the 1926 primary, David A. Reed and W. L. conferred several times with the local politicians. But they failed to effect a resolution. Frustrated by intransigence, Reed declared his neutrality, "a statement accepted as indicating the attitude of Secretary of the Treasury Andrew W. Mellon and his colleagues," and W. L. motored to Canada for a fishing vacation.²⁰

For several more weeks the mayoralty situation stagnated as neither Magee nor Leslie evinced a willingness to compromise.

¹⁹Harold F. Gosnell and William G. Coleman, "Political Trends in Industrial America: Pennsylvania An Example," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, IV (September, 1940), 483; Harold F. Alderfer and Robert M. Sigmond, *Presidential Elections by Pennsylvania Counties, 1920-1940* (State College, 1941), 2, 16-17; *New York Times*, November 20, 1924.

²⁰*Pittsburgh Post*, March 24, 26, May 19, 26, June 1, 5, 1925.

Some anticipated that W. L. would break the stalemate, and Leslie was reported to be awaiting a move by the Mellons. None forthcoming, he began promoting the candidacy of Judge Charles H. Kline. Rumors surfaced that Reed preferred dumping Magee and Kline in favor of a harmony candidate and that W. L. was opposed to endorsing anyone for the time being. But the reputed boss of Pittsburgh ignored the inert Mellon machine and plunged ahead with plans for a major rally at which Kline would declare. On the eve of the rally, and in the face of a *fait accompli*, W. L. phoned his support. One report had W. L. prepared to assent a week earlier but that he was dissuaded by Reed who remained optimistic about the prospect of a harmony agreement. With his opposition coalescing around one candidate and being short of campaign funds, Mayor Magee withdrew from the field.²¹

In their analysis of Kline's nomination, the *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, the *New York Times*, and David Reed were unanimous in the observation that W. L. was the responsible agent, reinforcing the common belief in an all-powerful Mellon machine. Yet the sequence of events argues that when W. L. and Reed could not negotiate a compromise, instead of dictating, they procrastinated. Had W. L. an organization under his control, he would not have gone to Canada, hoping for a miracle in his absence. Lacking the power of a boss, W. L. and the Mellon machine never really had any option but to subscribe to the decision of one who did, Leslie.²²

The difficulties in harmonizing local factions in 1925 proved to be a foretaste of problems to come in 1926, the political "year of the locust" for the Mellons. Beginning in September, 1925, a series of meetings were held in Washington and Pittsburgh to effect an amicable settlement between the Mellon-Reed-Pepper combine and William S. Vare concerning the Republican senatorial nominee. The major conference was a two-day affair in March, 1926, at A. W.'s home in the capital and was attended by Senators Reed and Pepper, Chairman Baker, Pittsburgh boss Leslie, Philadelphia chieftain

²¹*Ibid.*; *Pittsburgh Press* and *Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, July 25-August 2, 1925.

²²*Pittsburgh Gazette-Times*, July 31, 1925; *New York Times*, November 4, 1925; D. A. Reed to G. W. Pepper, August 1, 1925, G. W. Pepper Papers, Box 70, University of Pennsylvania. Samuel J. Astorino also credited the Mellons with dictating the nomination of Kline by freezing campaign funds for Magee. He saw it as a part of a larger strategy of maintaining control of Pittsburgh by limiting mayors to one term. They could do this, he argued, by virtue of their control of campaign funds. See "The Decline of the Republican Dynasty," 19, 66-67. Mayor Kline has testified that he discussed matters with W. L. before tossing his hat in the ring, but he vigorously denied being selected by him. United States, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures, *Hearings*, 656-657.

Vare, W. L. and A. W., with Grundy in telephone contact. Vare was arguing that Pepper could not repulse the anticipated challenge of Pinchot as he could. The Mellons hoped to persuade Vare to yield his senatorial aspirations in exchange for the right to name the gubernatorial candidate, the same compromise they had negotiated in 1922. The first day closed with no solution, and Vare refused to attend the second session, conferring instead with President Coolidge. Vare departed Washington convinced that the president would be neutral in an intraparty battle and that the prestige of the White House would be denied the Mellons and their candidate. Furthermore, in view of the lackluster performance of the Allegheny County GOP in the last two elections, as opposed to the size and vote generating capacity of his own organization, Vare was confident that he could defeat both Pepper and Pinchot while carrying a gubernatorial hopeful on his coattails. From his perspective, the Mellons had nothing to offer him, and thus there was no incentive to cooperate or to defer as he had previously. With control of two of the three major state offices, he would command the delegation to the 1928 convention and very likely dictate who would be his colleague in the upper chamber.²³

Any hope of compromise having evaporated with Vare's recalcitrance and with Pinchot in the field, A. W. consulted with several national party leaders and then plunged forward with his promotion of Pepper's candidacy. On March 24, 1926, the Mellons broke their precedent of implied endorsements by formally announcing that they were offering the voters a ticket of Pepper for senator and John S. Fisher for governor. The decision to include Fisher, an old friend, was an effort to attract support from Grundy in a lethal combination to destroy Vare. In exchange for Grundy's aid, however, the Mellons antagonized their most dependable source of votes, the Leslie organization, which preferred and supported Edward S. Beidleman, Vare's gubernatorial partner. Instead of merging their money with an organization of some vote getting ability as they had in the past, they merged their money with that of another respected fund raiser in the expectation that the proper utilization of wealth could fashion a majority. Their success or failure would be a test of the value of money in elections.²⁴

²³*Pittsburgh Post*, March 4, 6, 7, 11-13, 17-22, 1926; T. R. B., "Washington Notes," *New Republic*, XLVI (March 31, 1926), 170-171; William S. Vare, *My Forty Years in Politics* (Philadelphia, 1933), 152-153; United States, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures, *Hearings*, 156-167.

²⁴*Pittsburgh Post*, March 24, 28, and April 7-8, 21, 1926; Wike, *Pennsylvania*

After expending hundreds of thousands of dollars to flood the mailboxes of the state and to saturate the news media, the Mellons were still not confident of victory. And so A. W. brought Senator Reed and Secretary of Labor James J. Davis, a former steelworker, to Pittsburgh to address a major rally. Each would test his political credibility, and the combination of the three was interpreted by many as tantamount to an eleventh hour endorsement by the president. Lest their intentions be misunderstood, W. L. informed the voters that he and his uncle "have not gotten into the campaign in an attempt to become bosses but for the preservation of principles."²⁵

Before one of the largest crowds to attend a public meeting in the steel city to that time, almost 7,000, A. W. delivered the only avowedly political speech of his life before a live audience. Reminding the assemblage of the national importance of the state primary, he called on them to return a senator "who has staunchly supported the policies of the Republican administration in Washington." That most of his fifteen-minute oration focused on national affairs was illustrative of the secretary's principal focus. While alarmed at the future ramifications of Vare's attempt to seize control of the state, A. W. was essentially concerned in continuing someone he and the administration deemed dependable.²⁶

A. W.'s gesture proved futile as three days later Pepper went down to defeat, a distant second to Vare in the largest primary in state history. There was some solace to be had, however, as Fisher carried a narrow majority of 10,000 votes from a pool of almost one and one-half million. Interpretations abounded, with Senator Reed crediting prohibition as the deciding factor when Pepper and Pinchot divided the majority dry vote. A disconsolate and embittered Pepper attributed his defeat to a number of elements including alienation of a number of his friends because of his connection with Fisher, an association unwittingly foisted on him by the Mellons.

Manufacturers Association, 220-223; United States, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures, *Hearings*, 1070. Ann Hutton has argued that it was Grundy who persuaded the Mellons to accept Fisher. *The Pennsylvanian: Joseph R. Grundy* (Philadelphia, 1962), 183. A. W. also sought to spread the weight of his influence into neighboring New York by endorsing Ogden L. Mills, treasury spokesman in the House of Representatives, in his struggle for governor against Al Smith.

²⁵*Pittsburgh Post*, *Pittsburgh Press*, and *New York Times*, May 14-16, 1926. Only a few months earlier A. W. also had defended his nephew from charges of bossism. Referring to Pinchot's allegations that W. L. controlled the Allegheny County delegation in Harrisburg as "an indefensible insinuation," the secretary pointed out that W. L. was merely "a private citizen engaged in business in Pittsburgh, and just because he is the nephew of the secretary of the treasury is no reason for exploiting him in this direction." *Pittsburgh Post*, January 17, 1926.

²⁶*Pittsburgh Post*, May 15, 1926.

New Republic's T.R.B. viewed the results as a severe rebuke to the president and the Mellon interests and speculated that the secretary might well "lose all interest in politics and withdraw soon after the close of the (congressional) session from public life."²⁷

The ballots were not fully tabulated when an old nemesis of the Mellons, Senator James A. Reed (D-Mo.), sponsored a resolution to investigate expenditures in the primary, the second time in two years that the Senate had examined Republican party finances in the Keystone state. Testimony revealed that the Pepper-Fisher ticket spent nearly two million dollars, of which \$300,000 was raised in the Pittsburgh area. While evasively testifying and trying to explain his role in the campaign as "just helping along generally," W. L. admitted that A. W. and R. B. contributed \$25,000 each, that he subscribed a comparable amount, and that several business associates generously made donations. An additional \$158,000 in loans was guaranteed by W. L. and Mellon banking interests. In short, the Mellons provided almost all of the capital in the western half of the state for a candidate whose votes cost over \$3 apiece and yet was a loser.²⁸

In the midst of these revelations, W. L. was elected state party chairman. His selection was a face-saving device for the Mellons and unopposed by Vare who wanted Baker removed. W. L.'s duties would be largely ceremonial because Vare's Philadelphia organization would seal the victory in November and there would not be another statewide contest for two years. Continuing the Mellon claim that they sought nothing in political life but were always reluctantly drafted, W. L. explained that he consented to run only "because of urgent requests from a large number of leaders in various parts of the state."²⁹

The 1926 primary and the adverse publicity about buying elections were devastating for the Mellons, and the secretary welcomed the two-year respite before he would again have to enter the political

²⁷United States, Congress, Senate, 69th Congress, 1st session, May 19, 1926, *Congressional Record*, LXVII, 9675-76; Pepper, *Philadelphia Lawyer*, 214-219; T. R. B., "Washington Notes," *New Republic*, XLVII (June 2, 1926), 58-59. Frank Kent in "Pinchot vs. Pepper vs. Vare," *Nation*, CXXII (April 14, 1926), 398-399, agreed that if defeated, A. W. might well retire.

²⁸United States, Senate, Special Committee Investigating Expenditures, *Hearings*, 182-191, and 842-843; Louise Overacker, *Money in Elections* (New York, 1932), 119-120. The Special Senate Committee to Investigate Expenditures in the Presidential Campaign of 1924 (the Borah committee) held hearings, but they were never published.

²⁹*Pittsburgh Post*, June 8-13, 1926; F. Waldo, "The Outcome of the Republican Primaries in Pennsylvania," *Outlook*, CXLIII (June 2, 1926), 173-174; Stackpole, *Behind the Scenes*, 65.

malestrom. His vacation, however, was abruptly terminated in August, 1927, when President Coolidge bowed out of the presidential race and Governor Fisher began booming A. W. as the ideal man for the White House. Secretary of Labor Davis, Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work, two transplanted Pennsylvanians, and Postmaster General Harry New joined the band wagon and letters of encouragement began pouring into the treasury. The Hearst newspaper chain threw its resources behind Mellon, and its Pittsburgh outlet, the *Sun-Telegraph*, along with the *Post-Gazette*, editorialized on his behalf. T. A. Huntley, veteran political reporter for the *Post-Gazette*, observed that it was "almost an accepted fact that A. W. would be nominated by his homestate and at a minimum he would be a favorite son."³⁰

With the secretary on his annual European excursion, W. L. declined comment. When A. W. returned in early September to be greeted by a throng of anxious reporters, he appeared flattered by the adulation, coyly telling the newsmen that he "declined to express (himself) on the political situation." For three months he explored the possibilities, moving close enough to a positive declaration that a campaign biography was apparently commissioned. Then in late December he quashed all speculation with a terse statement: "I am not a candidate and won't be one." The only reason offered was his age, 73, but he may well have been swayed by opinions like that of the *New York Times* which commented that "his nomination for the Presidency would be absurd to the point of impossibility"³¹

Having removed himself, A. W. shifted his attention to the candidacies of two others, David A. Reed and Herbert Hoover. He was most desirous of securing the re-election of his man in the Senate and in thwarting the presidential ambitions of his cabinet rival. With Pinchot offering no hint of another try for the upper house, only Vare might stand in the way of the incumbent Reed. But because the investigation of campaign expenditures had led the Senate to deny him his seat and because he needed the junior senator as an advo-

³⁰*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, July 30, August 5, 16, 21, September 7, 1927; *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, July 31, 1927; Bent, *Strange Bedfellows*, 65; also see various editorial clippings and letters in Secretary's File, Official Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury, Record Group 56, Box 213, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The Hearst boom actually began a few days before Coolidge's announcement.

³¹*Pittsburgh Post*, September 8, 1927; *Pittsburgh Press* and *Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph*, December 29, 1927; *New York Times*, December 29-30, 1927. Phillip Love's *Andrew W. Mellon, The Man and His Work* (Baltimore, 1929) appears to be the end result of the proposed campaign biography.

cate, the Philadelphia machine leader readily offered his endorsement. With a united GOP behind him, Reed was nominated and elected with ease.³²

Vare's dilemma also assured agreeable negotiation of major party offices. W. L. stepped down as chairman, and the eastern organization acceded to the wishes of the Mellons as Auditor General Edward S. Martin was designated his successor. The Mellons in turn accepted General William W. Atterbury, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad and a nominal Vare adherent, as national committeeman to succeed Pepper. A. W. would have preferred W. L. or Reed, but there was no point in disrupting the new found harmony by being selfish.³³

Stopping Hoover would prove far more arduous and ultimately impossible. Working with Charles D. Hilles of New York, William M. Butler of Massachusetts, and others, A. W. hoped to manipulate a block of two hundred convention votes and to delay the great engineer until Coolidge was enticed from retirement or until a more acceptable candidate, possibly Charles Evans Hughes, emerged. Given this anti-Hoover posture, however, the secretary startled everyone with his political naïveté. Upon election as chairman of the state delegation, he declined a favorite son offer as an empty gesture for a non-candidate. He would lead a contingent to Kansas City which was committed to no one candidate but which leaned decidedly toward the front running secretary of commerce.³⁴

Though identified in the press as a king maker, "the man who is likely to dictate the nomination," A. W. continued his quixotic behavior by announcing on his arrival at the convention that he would abide by the directions of his state caucus. As A. W. floundered in his quest to deny Hoover, Vare "snatched the 'key' of the National Convention." The still unseated senator, an unabashed Hoover supporter, declared that he and at least fifteen delegates from the Philadelphia area could be counted for the commerce secretary. With that, the Pennsylvania delegation fell into line, and the great engineer rolled on to a first ballot triumph. The victor of the seamy 1926 election was hailed for doing what A. W. could not bring himself to do. Will Rogers described matters succinctly and offered a

³²*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 1, 23, March 4, 5, November 20, 1928.

³³*Ibid.*, May 12-14, 1928; Edward Martin, *Always Be On Time, An Autobiography* (Harrisburg, 1954), 58-60.

³⁴Mellon, *Mellon's Sons*, 463-465; James E. Watson, *As I Knew Them* (Indianapolis, 1936), 256; *New York Times*, February 16, 1928; *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and *Pittsburgh Press*, May 11-14, 1928.

fitting epitaph for A. W.'s political career: "Mellon had the money, but Vare had the votes."³⁵

In the clash with the Democrats, A. W. ironically performed more actively than he had four years earlier. The Mellon money again lined the coffers of the Republican National Committee as A. W. and R. B. gave \$25,000 and \$27,000 respectively. The secretary took to the radio not once but twice to promote GOP policies and to endorse Hoover formally, something he had done for Coolidge only by implication. A press statement was also issued with A. W. calling for a GOP congress which would cooperate with the president. With the Mellons firmly behind the national ticket, Pennsylvania returned its accustomed near two-thirds majority. Yet Allegheny County, after its flirtation with the Progressives, responded with only a 56 percent majority, substantial but well below the 1920 figure of the pre-Mellon era (69 percent) and slightly less than what it had been in 1924 (59 percent).³⁶

Nineteen twenty-nine found Secretary Mellon preoccupied with the state of the nation's finances. It was also an election year, the Pittsburgh mayoralty. As had so often been the case in the previous two decades, the local organization had splintered since the last quadrennium. The GOP primary promised to be a factional struggle of major proportions. Mayor Kline, like his predecessor Mayor Magee, had broken with his sponsor, Leslie. He intended to run for re-election in spite of the machine leader's objections and in the face of growing allegations of graft and corruption.³⁷

A. W. and W. L. met in Pittsburgh in mid-August to assess the situation and to determine if they would play any role in the primary. W. L. also conferred with local party leaders. Then, as he had four years earlier, he left the factions to settle their own prob-

³⁵*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, May 23, June 8-13, 1928; *New York Times*, June 11-13, 1928; "The Case of Andrew Mellon," *Nation*, CXXVI (June 20, 1928), 682-683; Vare, *Forty Years*, 184-186. Vare's decision was presumably prompted by a desire to swing Hoover behind him in his struggle with the Senate. Hoover, however, recalled that he was not fooled by Vare, a man he disliked, because Mellon had already called to inform the candidate that he planned to recommend Hoover to the Pennsylvania delegation. "It was obvious that he (Vare) had sensed Mr. Mellon's intentions and wanted to get out in front. As it turned out, I did not need the Pennsylvania delegation anyway." H. Hoover, *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Cabinet and The Presidency* (New York, 1952), II, 194.

³⁶*New York Times*, October 12, 29, 30, 1928; Overacker, *Money in Elections*, 159; Alderfer and Sigmund, *Presidential Elections*, 2, 19. During his one radio talk, "Republican Policies," the secretary was nervous; and the shaking papers in his hands rubbed against the microphone, making "a sound hardly audible in the studio, but as amplified west into Chicago, for instance, like a thunderstorm." *New York Times*, December 16, 1928.

³⁷*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 10-12, 1929; Parker, "State of Allegheny," 3-4.

lems while he vacationed in Canada. Wounded by a succession of defeats and with no particular concern about the steel city contest beyond an ever present desire for harmony instead of strife, W. L. telegraphed a neutrality message from his self-imposed exile. "As such a large number of candidates are my friends, I have determined to take no part in the primary campaign unless some unexpected change should occur." No change took place. The Mellons remained neutral, and Mayor Kline marched on to an easy victory. In the process Kline deposed Leslie, whose health and political grip had been declining since 1926. With Leslie gone, what strength or influence the family ever had in Pittsburgh politics was but a shell of the past.³⁸

Shortly after the mayoralty campaign, the Senate rendered its final decision in the case of William S. Vare, voting fifty-eight to twenty-two not to seat him. Governor Fisher, in the face of a threat from Senator Gerald Nye (R-N.D.) not to nominate anyone affiliated with Joseph R. Grundy or the Mellons for fear of rejection, appointed his mentor. The decision was satisfactory to the Mellons who helped persuade the elderly, high tariff advocate to follow in the footsteps of A. W. and to abandon the behind the scenes role of fund raiser for the glamour of public life. W. L. termed the appointment most fortunate for Grundy was "a man well fitted for office," and A. W. was pleased that there again were two men in the Senate on whom he could rely.³⁹

The last hurrah for the so-called Mellon machine came in the GOP primary of 1930. Two days after his rejection, Vare announced that he would run again to vindicate himself, though Grundy gave no indication that he would step aside. Several conferences were held in Washington, some in A. W.'s apartment. The Mellons sought to mediate the differences. The Mellon interest in the primary, grounded in friendship with Grundy and general desire for party harmony, changed substantially, however, when Vare declared that ill health would prevent him from campaigning and that he intended to endorse Secretary of Labor James J. Davis. Although he had not lived there for over two decades, Davis claimed Pittsburgh

³⁸*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, August 13-15, 25, 1929; Astorino, "Decline of the Republican Dynasty," 66-80, thoroughly analyzed the 1929 mayoralty race but erroneously concluded that Kline's victory was a major defeat, the beginning of the end for the Mellons.

³⁹*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 7, 12, 1929, April 14, 1930; *Pittsburgh Press*, December 12, 1929; *New York Times*, December 13, 1929. For a thorough analysis of Vare's struggle to be seated, see Samuel J. Astorino, "The Contested Senate Election of William Scott Vare," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (April, 1961), 187-201.

as his home. Should he emerge the winner, David A. Reed's seat would be in jeopardy as the two senate seats were traditionally divided between the east and west.⁴⁰

The Mellon strategy in 1930 was the same as it had been in 1922 and 1926, convince Vare and the Philadelphia organization to yield on the senate post in exchange for the right to name the gubernatorial candidate. They went as far as to help induce State Treasurer Samuel S. Lewis, Grundy's choice for governor, to retire from the field and to express a willingness to support the Vare candidate, Francis S. Brown. The prospect had some appeal for Vare. But Grundy, more independent than Pepper had been four years earlier, was not about to be ticketed by the Mellons with Brown or anyone else not to his liking. Never really keen on Lewis and unwilling to compromise with his old antagonist Vare, Grundy ignored the plight of the Mellons and re-established his 1922 alliance with Gifford Pinchot. With the party seriously factionalized, the former governor had decided to try again for the state's highest job and would campaign in tandem with Grundy.⁴¹

The ability of the Mellons to cope with a fluid situation in which delicate negotiations were regularly conducted beyond the pale of public awareness was hamstrung much of the time by W. L.'s inexplicable absence on a late winter Florida vacation. Frequently out of direct contact, they had little or no input into Grundy's decision. Further, when they turned to the Pittsburgh GOP organization for assistance, the new leadership, friendly with Davis and antagonistic to Reed, rebuffed them. Because the Mellons had little to exchange in the bargaining process, the various power brokers were simply ignoring them.⁴²

Unable to achieve a compromise and negotiate a harmony ticket, W. L. declared the Mellons would support a ticket of Grundy and Brown. Given the available candidates and the political realities from their perspective, they had no other choice, *if* they intended to offer endorsements for the two offices. They could have just cast their lot with Grundy, ignoring the governor's race. Why they did

⁴⁰*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, February 4, 6, 8, 12-14, 15, 20, 1930. Astorino, "Decline of the Republican Dynasty," 66-67, interpreted the Mellons' role in the 1930 primary as an effort to seize "Penrose's mantle" now that Vare had been denied a Senate seat, was ill, and was experiencing a series of challenges for his leadership of the Philadelphia machine.

⁴¹*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 5, 10, 12-13, 15, 17, 19, 22, 24, 1930; *New York Times*, February 4, March 25, 1930; McGeary, *Pinchot*, 346-350; and Hutton, *Grundy*, 200-205; Wike, *Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association*, 229-232, 273-279.

⁴²*Ibid.*

not do so is perplexing. Or, in view of the numerous past failures when they endorsed candidates, they could have said nothing publicly and quietly employed their money and other resources on Grundy's behalf. But politicians who divide their loyalties, like generals who divide their armies, are at best assuming a calculated risk.⁴³

The end result of the Mellon strategy was complete disaster as both Grundy and Brown were defeated. The debacle of 1930 confirmed what much of the public had suspected and what most Pennsylvania politicians had known for years. When it came to delivering a vote and to deciding an election, the Mellon machine was a meaningless sham. "The Gentleman at the Keyhole" in *Colliers* aptly summarized the situation.

The Mellons, who were, politically, never much more than a name, will, if they don't look out, go down with Grundy The city machines of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, when they don't fall out, will control the Republican party of Pennsylvania, as the city machine of New York controls the Democratic party of the state of New York.⁴⁴

As the 1930s wore on and the depression deepened, the role and interest of the Mellons in the world of politics rapidly diminished. While they stood back and watched, progressive Republicans, aligned with Governor Pinchot, gained control of Allegheny County in 1931. A year later Hoover carried Pennsylvania, but the Democratic party, a virtual nonentity until the Mellons began exerting themselves in the citadels of power, carried Pittsburgh and Allegheny County. A Democratic mayor was elected in 1933, and the party of Jefferson and Jackson instituted a machine more efficient than any of its Republican predecessors. The following year David A. Reed was upended in his bid for re-election. Each year another disaster befell the GOP in the "state of Allegheny," and the Mellons could do nothing to retard it. When A. W. resigned from public life in 1933, with him went any pretense of a Mellon machine. Though latter day Mellons would revert to the family tradition as it existed before 1920, involving themselves in civic affairs and funding Re-

⁴³*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 24-29, April 14, 1930. Irwin F. Greenberg, "Pinchot, Prohibition, and Public Utilities: The Pennsylvania Election of 1930," *Pennsylvania History*, XL (January, 1973), 21-35, offered an excellent analysis of the election from a different perspective but erroneously reported that the Mellons supported a Brown-Davis ticket. Wike implies the same thing, saying that the Mellons followed Pepper's lead. Wike, *Pennsylvania Manufacturers Association*, 276-277.

⁴⁴"All or Nothing," *Colliers*, LXXXV (May 17, 1930), 52.

publican campaign committees, none has ever given consideration to resurrecting that hollow name, the Mellon machine.⁴⁵

Was the Mellon machine a myth or a reality? In the absolute sense of a political organization in the business of "getting votes and winning elections," it was a myth; but it was not a lie, nor was it a fraud. The general public, skilled political observers, and professional politicians assumed for a decade that the wealth and economic power of the Mellon family would be transformed into political power. Even the family succumbed for a while. With each setback, however, confidence was eroded, and most contemporaries gradually came to understand that the transference would not be made. But some observers, particularly critics and latterday historians, have never fully grasped the fact that the Mellon machine was never more than a hollow myth. Enamored by the myth and unable or unwilling to perceive the reality, historians have erroneously perpetuated the myth of a Mellon machine to this day.

⁴⁵George S. Bailey, "Mellonism Takes the Count," *Nation*, CXXXIII (December 2, 1931), 594-595.