Philadelphia Democrats Get a New Deal: The Election of 1933

Before 1933, Philadelphia had been a one-party, Republican city. It was the municipal election of 1933 that marked the beginning of the revival of permanent two-party politics. That election also witnessed the rejuvenation of the Philadelphia Democratic Party. The minority party took on new leaders and new spirit. By the end of 1933, the Philadelphia Democrats had become a formidable opposition party.

During the 1920's, Republican strength reached its peak in Philadelphia. Majorities of over 70 per cent were returned for GOP candidates.¹ The leader of the dominant Republican machine, William S. Vare, was the “boss” of the city’s political affairs.

The Democratic Party provided Vare and the Republicans with little opposition. Satisfied with patronage favors received from the Republican machine and afraid to offend their GOP patrons, Democratic politicians did little to enliven the minority party. Thus, the Philadelphia Democratic Party became an adjunct of the Republican machine, a “kept minority.”

The leader of the “kept minority” was John O’Donnell, a native of South Philadelphia and a close friend of Bill Vare. For more than thirty years, O’Donnell had been dependent on Republican patronage for his livelihood. He had received his first appointment in 1903, when he was named to a magistrate post. In 1913 he became a real estate assessor. He reached the peak of his career in 1923 when,

¹ One exception to Republican strength was Al Smith’s impressive showing in the election of 1928. The Democratic presidential candidate accounted for 39 per cent of the city’s votes and carried five wards. The Democratic upsurge of 1928, however, was only temporary. Without Smith at the head of their ticket, Democratic candidates received only a small portion of the city’s votes in 1929, 1930, and 1931.
again through the aid of the Republicans, he was elected minority county commissioner, a post he held until his retirement in 1935.2

Even though O'Donnell was chairman of the Democratic City Committee and the leader of the minority party, his first loyalties were to Vare and the Republicans. His livelihood and that of his friends was dependent on Republican patronage. In 1932, when O'Donnell aided Vare in a factional dispute, he explained his action by saying: “Bill Vare has been my friend. He has helped me and I am with him at this time.”3 When one Democrat suggested that O'Donnell break with Vare, the Democratic chairman refused, declaring that he could not “do that to my old friend who has kept me on his payroll for so many years. Vare has been paying the rent on Democratic headquarters. I can’t bite the hand that’s fed me.”4

The Democratic national and state leaders read O'Donnell out of the party in 1928, but that action did not end his power. Since the Democrats had no federal or state patronage at their disposal, O'Donnell was able to maintain control over the city committee with the Republican patronage. The state and national party organizations did not accept O'Donnell as the Democratic leader of Philadelphia until 1932, when he backed Franklin D. Roosevelt in his bid for the party's presidential nomination. After the election of 1932, O'Donnell was again the recognized leader of the Philadelphia Democratic Party.

Many Philadelphia Democrats, however, refused to accept his leadership. Within the Democratic City Committee three factions sought to depose him. These factions, who fought each other as well as O'Donnell, were led by the “three Toms”: Thomas M. McDermott, Thomas E. Minnick, and Thomas A. Logue. All three were old-line Democrats. Logue, the leader of the city's Smith Democrats in 1932, had organized several anti-O'Donnell movements in the past. Minnick was the leader of the fifteenth ward. He and his father before him had been factors in the local party since the early years of the century. Minnick and Logue, however, had to bear the

3 Ledger, Apr. 24, 1932. All newspapers cited were published in Philadelphia.
4 J. David Stern, Memoirs of a Maverick Publisher (New York, 1962), 200.
onus of having supported Smith in 1932. Minnick, in fact, was treated with even greater disdain, for he had been elected as a Roosevelt delegate and then reneged on his pledge.

McDermott, on the other hand, had been for Roosevelt "before Chicago"; but he had drawbacks. He had been an O'Donnell man, and did not sever his connections with the city committee chairman until February, 1933. McDermott’s party loyalty was also suspect. He had bolted the Democratic ticket in 1930 and supported Gifford Pinchot in the gubernatorial contest. In addition to the “three Toms” there were also many nonfactional Democrats who were trying to oust O’Donnell. Roosevelt and James A. Farley, the chairman of the Democratic National Committee, had been receiving complaints about O’Donnell since before the Chicago convention. Independent Democrats had constantly urged Farley to depose O’Donnell, so the Philadelphia Democrats could erect “a new, fighting, honest and consistent party structure.” Many of the city’s wealthy Democrats, whose financial contributions would be needed to meet party debts, also found O’Donnell’s leadership repugnant.

The most influential of O’Donnell’s enemies was J. David Stern, the publisher of the city’s only Democratic newspaper, the Record. Aside from the power he wielded through his paper, Stern was on close terms with Roosevelt and the national party leaders. In early 1933 Stern told Farley and the Pennsylvania state party leaders, Joseph F. Guffey and Warren VanDyke, that it would be impossible for him to work with O’Donnell.

Guffey, VanDyke, and Farley shared Stern’s feelings about O’Donnell, but there was little they could do. They had no power to depose him; only the city committee could do that. By using the federal patronage to foster a rival organization, however, they could aid in his downfall. But if they did that, the party leaders would be

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5 Record, Feb. 4, 1933.
7 A. E. Hurshman to Roosevelt, Apr. 28, July 8, 1932, Democratic National Campaign Committee Correspondence, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library; R. Scurgis Ingersoll to James A. Farley, July 19, 1932, in with Ingersoll to John J. Raskob, July 20, 1932, John J. Raskob Papers, Democratic Victory Fund Section, Eleutherian Mills Historical Library.
8 For background on Stern and the Record, see Greenberg, 405-414.
considered "ingrates." O'Donnell had been promised control of the federal patronage in Philadelphia when he agreed to back Roosevelt in 1932. Both Roosevelt and Guffey were obligated to him. He was responsible for electing six delegates for Roosevelt and had delivered the critical votes that gave Guffey control of the state committee.

Early in 1933, Guffey and Farley gave O'Donnell a chance to redeem himself. They called him to New York and told him to sever his connections with Vare. They also warned him that, if he wanted to remain in good standing with the national party organization, he had to agree to the establishment of a special advisory committee to help manage the Philadelphia city committee. The members of the new body, the party leaders explained, would be named by O'Donnell, but would have to be approved by Guffey and Farley. Until he met these terms, O'Donnell was told, no federal patronage would be dispensed in Philadelphia. Even the appointment of his son as postmaster of the city, which had been promised O'Donnell when he joined the Roosevelt movement in 1932, would be held back until that time.⁹

This meeting between O'Donnell and the party leaders had taken place in February. By the end of July, O'Donnell still had not met their terms. The city committee had passed a resolution establishing an advisory committee, but O'Donnell had not named anyone to serve on it. Neither had he broken with Vare. Nevertheless, O'Donnell insisted that the party leaders distribute the federal patronage. He said that their demands were unreasonable. "When I took over the Roosevelt campaign in Philadelphia," he argued, "they didn't think it was necessary to appoint an advisory board. Why should there be one now?"¹⁰

As the deadline for slating candidates for the September primary neared, relations between O'Donnell and the party leaders became tense. All candidates running in the primary had to file their petitions by the middle of August. The proposed advisory committee had to be appointed soon in order to provide it with enough time to select the Democratic candidates. Guffey gave O'Donnell the names of seven persons to serve on the advisory committee; but he re-

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⁹ Bulletin, Sept. 28, 1933
¹⁰ Ledger, May 19, 1933; Record, May 23, 28, July 28, 1933.
jected five of them. By this time, the party leaders had had enough of O'Donnell's stalling. They issued an ultimatum warning him that either he would do as they asked by the end of one week, or the state committee would oust him from the chairmanship and take over control of the city committee itself.\textsuperscript{11}

O'Donnell was in a difficult position. He wanted to meet the demands of the party leaders in order to receive the federal patronage and enhance his standing with the Roosevelt administration, but nearly 200 of his friends and followers held city or county positions. Vare had warned O'Donnell that, if he yielded to the demands laid down by Guffey and Farley, these employees would be fired. O'Donnell pleaded with Vare to reconsider, but the Republican "boss" refused. O'Donnell told Guffey of his plight. He explained that he would break with Vare and appoint the advisory committee if the party leaders would assure him that all of the men fired from their city and county jobs would receive positions with the federal government; but Guffey would not give O'Donnell this guarantee.\textsuperscript{12}

Nevertheless, O'Donnell finally yielded to his Democratic superiors. At the city committee meeting of August third, he publicly renounced his ties with Vare and named an advisory committee. He berated the Vare organization as "the Republican Machine that has so ruthlessly and arrogantly brought Philadelphia to the verge of financial collapse while remaining singularly blind to the needs of the sick, the aged and the unemployed." He admitted making deals with the Republicans in the past, but pledged that he would no longer do so. He vowed to fight for "Democratic principles."\textsuperscript{13}

But O'Donnell had waited too long. An anti-O'Donnell movement had already been formed and had attracted a wide following. McDermott, Minnick, and Logue submerged their factional differences and organized the Philadelphia Democratic League. McDermott explained that the League had no quarrel with Guffey and VanDyke, who had lined up behind O'Donnell once he met their demands, but believed that they did not have full knowledge of the local situation. The League, he said, was going to run a full ticket against the O'Donnell slate in the primary, "and if Joseph F. Guffey and Van-

\textsuperscript{11} Record, July 18, 19, 29, 1933.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., Aug. 1, 1933.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., Aug. 4, 1933.
Dyke do not come to O'Donnell's assistance we assure them we will eliminate O'Donnell and present to the State organization a simon-pure ticket of real Democrats.\textsuperscript{14}

Guffey and VanDyke appeared satisfied with O'Donnell's actions. He had appointed an advisory committee and had broken with Vare, which was what they had asked. Most of the city's Democrats, however, doubted O'Donnell's sincerity. The \textit{Record} warned that it would take more than a verbal pledge to become a real Democratic leader. In the past, it continued, the Vare-O'Donnell relationship had been intimate, and "old friendships die hard. Both Vare and O'Donnell are men who have the word loyalty always on their lips."\textsuperscript{15} The fact that none of the Democrats who held city or county positions were fired also questioned the credibility of O'Donnell's actions. One Democrat charged that O'Donnell's break with Vare was a farce, mere "lip service" to the demands of the party leaders.\textsuperscript{16}

The Philadelphia Democratic League slated its own ticket for the primary. For the offices of register of wills and coroner it selected two old-line Democrats, Harry V. Dougherty and Tom Minnick. The League went outside the party for its controller and treasurer, naming two popular anti-Vare Republicans, S. Davis Wilson and WillB Hadley,\textsuperscript{17} who were also running in the GOP primary. Cross-filing was a common practice in Philadelphia's primary elections.\textsuperscript{18}

Hadley had been city controller since 1921, a post in which he had proved himself a diligent and honest public servant. He was so well respected by the voters that the Republican organization had been forced to slate him for re-election three times, even though his actions were often at odds with those of influential members of the party. Wilson had been Hadley's assistant for the past five years.

In personality, the two men were the antithesis of each other. Where Hadley was shy, withdrawn, and politically naive, Wilson was extroverted, outspoken, egotistical and politically opportunistic. When the controller's office found irregularities in a set of books it

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, July 29, 1933.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid.}, Aug. 5, 1933.
\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, Aug. 5, 6, 1933.
\textsuperscript{17} This is not a typographical error. Hadley's name was WillB, not Will B. Rather than name him Will Hadley, Jr., Hadley's mother added the extra letter to his first name.
\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Record}, Aug. 14, 1933.
was auditing, or even suspected wrongdoing, Wilson saw that the facts received the widest possible publicity. Politically, Wilson was a maverick. A registered Republican, he had headed the Independent Roosevelt League in 1932 and had managed the anti-Vare primary campaign of Gifford Pinchot in 1930.

Rumors of Vare’s intention to dump Hadley from the organization’s slate might have been the factor that sparked the announcement by Wilson and Hadley that they would lead an independent, anti-Vare movement in the fall. In addition, Governor Gifford Pinchot was urging them to take this action. Looking for an opportunity to defeat Vare, who was a bitter personal and factional enemy of the governor, as well as a chance to increase his own influence in the city, Pinchot, it was reported, had worked out a scheme with Wilson and Hadley. If the two men were to lead an anti-Vare movement, it was reasoned, Wilson would have to do most of the campaigning and make the political moves. Hadley did not have the temperament suited for that kind of work.

In May, 1933, Hadley suddenly announced that he was resigning from his post as controller and would retire to private life. As required by law, the governor appointed Hadley’s successor, who would serve until a new controller was elected in the fall. To fill the vacancy, Pinchot selected Wilson. The new controller immediately announced that he would run for a full term in the fall. He also declared that Hadley had reconsidered his decision to return to private life and would seek the post of treasurer.¹⁹

O’Donnell let his newly appointed advisory committee select his candidates for the primary. The committee consisted of a highly respected group of Democrats, numbering among its members William C. Bullitt and John Dickinson, a former University of Pennsylvania law professor who was an assistant secretary of commerce in the Roosevelt administration. The candidates whom the advisory committee selected for controller and treasurer could hardly be criticized as ward heelers or incompetent placeseekers. For controller, it chose W. Curtis Bok, grandson of publishing magnate Cyrus H. K. Curtis, and for treasurer, Gilbert Spruance, a wealthy paint manufacturer.

¹⁹ Ibid., May 16, 17, 1933.
O'Donnell accepted the slate drawn up by the advisory committee, and it appeared that he had a strong ticket to run in the primary; but a rude shock awaited the city committee chairman. Less than twelve hours before the filing deadline, Bok and Spruance withdrew from the contest, refusing to run as O'Donnell's candidates. The chairman tried to find replacements, but was unsuccessful. Within a week his candidates for register of wills and coroner also retired from the race. Thus, O'Donnell was left without a ticket.\(^{20}\)

O'Donnell later charged that the last minute withdrawal of Bok and Spruance was part of a calculated plan to prevent his entering a slate in the primary. He claimed that Guffey, VanDyke and "several gentlemen standing high in the community" had persuaded Bok and Spruance to withdraw.\(^{21}\) O'Donnell's allegations about Guffey and VanDyke were probably true, for they forced O'Donnell to support the Wilson-Hadley ticket after his own slate blew-up.\(^{22}\) The state party leaders knew that if the Democrats were to win in the fall, they would need the support of independent Republicans, and the best way to get their votes was to have Wilson and Hadley on the Democratic ticket. Even before O'Donnell's slating fiasco, Guffey and VanDyke had tried to persuade Wilson and Hadley to run on the Democratic ticket.\(^{23}\)

Forcing O'Donnell to accept the Wilson-Hadley slate, however, was the only direct aid that Guffey and VanDyke gave the anti-O'Donnell Democrats. VanDyke announced that the state and national party organizations would remain neutral in the Philadelphia primary, letting the city's Democrats work out the situation themselves. Federal patronage, VanDyke said, would not be distributed until after the primary, when the Democratic voters had decided which person or faction they wanted to lead them.\(^{24}\)

Though their "hands off" policy was allegedly meant to favor neither side, Guffey, VanDyke, and Farley knew that it would help

\(^{20}\) Ibid., Aug. 15, 19, 22, 1933.
\(^{21}\) Bulletin, Sept. 28, 1933.
\(^{22}\) It was reported that Guffey and VanDyke had forced O'Donnell to back the Wilson-Hadley ticket by threatening to deny his son the postmastership if he refused. Ledger, Aug. 15, 1933.
\(^{23}\) Record, Aug. 3, 5, 1933.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., Aug. 17, 1933.
the anti-O'Donnell Democrats. Without the backing of the party leaders and the power of the federal patronage, O'Donnell had little influence with the greatly enlarged Democratic electorate. The majority of the party's voters were behind the independent Democrats.

A week after he had been forced to accept the Wilson-Hadley ticket, O'Donnell went to Washington to ask Guffey and Farley to help him. He wanted them to bring harmony between him and the independent Democrats, so that the victory of the Wilson-Hadley slate in the primary would not look like a repudiation of his leadership. Instead of doing as O'Donnell asked, however, Guffey and Farley demanded that he resign as chairman of the city committee, threatening to deny his son the postmastership if he refused; but this tactic did not work. O'Donnell said that his son did not want the post if it meant his father's retirement from politics.25

O'Donnell left Washington in a rage, determined to fight for his political survival. He vowed to run a ticket against the independent Democrats in the primary. Since it was too late for new candidates to file, O'Donnell had to devise a ticket from the many "free lance" candidates who had already entered their names on the ballot. These men had entered the contest with no organized backing. They were usually of two types: either self-serving placeseekers, who hoped that another candidate would induce them to withdraw by bribes and promises of a job if elected, or just crackpots. The slate drawn up by O'Donnell and approved by the city committee was a combination of the two, a weak ticket consisting of political unknowns.26

Dave Stern was the main driving force behind the anti-O'Donnell movement, constantly attacking O'Donnell in the pages of the Record. Stern had also played the major role in keeping the state and national party leaders from backing O'Donnell. Once he convinced them to stay neutral in the primary, Stern knew that the independent Democrats would win. His next problem was finding a new leader for the party. Although Stern, because of his close relations with Roosevelt and the influence of the Record, was one of the most important factors in the Philadelphia Democratic Party, he

25 Ibid., Aug. 17, 18, 22, 26, 1933; Ledger, Aug. 17, 1933.
26 Ibid., Sept. 8, 1933. O'Donnell's slate consisted of Thomas J. Turner for controller, Porter F. Cope for treasurer, John King for register of wills, and Dr. Leopold Vaccarro for coroner.
himself could not replace O'Donnell. He had neither the time, personality, nor popular appeal for such a task.

It was also impossible to select a new leader from among the members of the Democratic League. First of all, Stern did not get along well with most of the old-line Democrats because he was a newcomer to the party. Also, the League consisted of competing factions, each one jealous of the other. If one of the "Toms" took over, the other two would sulk. A new leader had to be found from outside the Democratic factions, someone who could work harmoniously with both the old-line Democrats and the newer Roosevelt Democrats while winning the confidence of independent Republicans. He would also have to have the ability and personality to unite the anti-O'Donnell Democrats into an efficient political organization. That was when a handsome, broad-shouldered Irishman named John B. Kelly entered the scene.

Jack Kelly was forty-three years old and the owner of a highly successful brick contracting firm when he took over leadership of the anti-O'Donnell Democrats. He was widely known in sporting circles, his champion rowing skills bringing him worldwide renown. His spectacular triumphs in the 1920 and 1924 Olympics had made him a popular hero among Philadelphians. The youngest of seven children of Irish immigrants, Kelly was a self-made man. Two of his brothers also had achieved wide fame. One, Walter, was a popular comedian on the Broadway stage; another, George, was a Pulitzer prize-winning playwright. Jack had inherited his brothers' talents for comedy and writing, a fact apparent in his speeches. His attractive appearance, combined with his lively Irish wit and pleasant delivery, made him an excellent speaker, whether on the political stump or at a testimonial dinner.

Kelly also had other assets, the most important of which was his wealth. He was a millionaire, and willing to spend a great deal of money for the party. The fact that he was not dependent on politics for his livelihood made his political activities less suspect.

Kelly brought other wealthy men into the party with him. Joining him as "co-leader" of the party was Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr., another millionaire contractor. Preferring to work behind the scenes, McCloskey specialized in fund-raising. He proved so successful in this capacity that he later became treasurer of the Demo-
Democratic National Committee. With Kelly providing the glamour and enthusiasm, McCloskey the organizing skill and the funds, and the Record the publicity and ideological impulse, the Philadelphia Democrats began what was to be a successful campaign toward rejuvenation.

The way in which Kelly became the new party leader is not perfectly clear. Dave Stern claims complete credit for the rise of Kelly. One evening while dining in a Philadelphia restaurant with his wife, Stern recalled, he began to discuss with her the problem of finding someone to replace O'Donnell. Then his wife said, pointing to Kelly, who was in the same restaurant, "Why don't you pick a man like him as party leader? He's good-looking, popular, successful, and a great athlete." Stern at first rejected the idea, arguing that Kelly had never been in politics and knew nothing about it. Besides, Kelly was a Republican, although he had supported Roosevelt in 1932. Stern, however, soon changed his mind. He offered Kelly the opportunity to lead the movement to oust O'Donnell and reorganize the Philadelphia Democratic party.

Although Stern probably played an important role in the selection of Kelly, his recollections, written almost thirty years after the incident, may not be completely accurate. One possibility is that Kelly might have sought out Stern and was more eager to enter politics than Stern remembered. Kelly later recalled that he had first entered politics because the assessment on his house was doubled. When he learned that the only way to reduce it was through bribery and graft, he became so angry that he decided to enter politics and change these corrupt conditions. Joseph Sharfsin, who was active in the anti-O'Donnell movement at the time, thinks that Kelly and McCloskey had begun to show an interest in the Democratic Party as early as the election of 1932. John O'Donnell, while recounting his meeting with Guffey, Farley, and other Philadelphia Democrats in

27 McCloskey was the originator of the $100 a plate dinner.
28 Stern, 205–206.
29 The assessment story was told by Kelly in an interview that is cited in Peter B. Bart and Milton C. Cummings, Jr., "Politics and Voting Behavior in Philadelphia" (unpublished senior honors thesis, Swarthmore College, 1954), unpaged. The assessment story was also cited by Joseph Sharfsin, a politician active during these years. Joseph Sharfsin, interview at his office, July 15, 1970. A copy of this interview is at the Temple University Urban Archives.
30 Sharfsin interview.
New York in February, 1933, where he had been ordered to cut his ties with Vare and name an advisory committee, mentioned that Matt McCloskey had also been at that gathering.31

Kelly never referred to himself as a politician. He claimed to be just a concerned citizen who wanted to improve the political conditions of the city. “I don’t want you to think of Jack Kelly as a politician,” he told a radio audience. “How I loathe that term!”32 The reason he was chosen to lead the independent Democrats, he explained, was that neither Minnick, McDermott, nor Logue would agree to let one of the others take control. “They were all Irish, God bless ’em,” said Kelly, “and if they couldn’t play ball their own way they wouldn’t play.” They accepted him as their new leader, Kelly continued, because he was connected with none of the other factions, and “I didn’t want anything for myself.”33

The first mention of Kelly in connection with Democratic politics occurred when his was one of the names suggested by Guffey for the city committee’s advisory board that was rejected by O’Donnell in late July.34 In mid-August, Kelly was chosen chairman of the Roosevelt Democratic League—not to be confused with the Philadelphia Democratic League of Minnick, McDermott, and Logue. Kelly’s organization consisted of anti-Vare Republicans who had supported Roosevelt in 1932.35 A few days after it was organized, the Roosevelt Democratic League joined forces with the Philadelphia Democratic League, and Kelly was selected to head the new group. The new organization, which supported the Wilson-Hadley-Dougherty-Minnick ticket in the primary, was called the Independent Democratic Campaign Committee (IDCC).36

The first goal of the IDCC was not the ouster of O’Donnell as chairman of the city committee. If it succeeded in building itself into a strong organization that would defeat O’Donnell’s candidates in the primary, lead the party to victory in the general election, and

31 Bulletin, Sept. 28, 1933.
33 Unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., ibid.
34 Record, July 28, 1933. Kelly was not a member of the advisory committee that was finally appointed by O’Donnell.
36 Ibid., Aug. 18, 1933.
gain the recognition of state and national party leaders, IDCC spokesmen explained, control of the city committee was not essential. That goal could wait until the spring primaries.

Chances for a Democratic victory in the general election were excellent. The party was riding the crest of the New Deal's popularity, and Republican opposition to relief and recovery measures in the state legislature had turned many voters against the GOP. Added to these advantages was the fact that the Vare machine was wracked by internal dissension. By the time primary day arrived, the Vare slate was caught between two cross-fires—disgruntled members of the organization, who were unhappy because they had not been recognized on the party ticket, and independent Republicans, who were pursuing their perennial drive to oust Vare and reform the party.\(^{37}\)

The independent Democrats had few problems in the primary. O'Donnell's weak, contrived slate, plus his general unpopularity and the great increase in the number of registered Democrats,\(^{38}\) meant that the IDCC candidates were practically assured the nomination. The independent Democrats argued that O'Donnell was not suited for the new political conditions that were being ushered in by the New Deal. The Record set the tone for the Democratic primary when it declared: "O'Donnell doesn't seem to be able to grasp the fact that the Democratic party need no longer be hopelessly in the minority here. The truth that the Roosevelt Administration is a turning point for the Democracy does not penetrate the O'Donnell cranium."\(^{39}\)

The main campaign issue for the IDCC was neither O'Donnell, Vare, nor municipal corruption. It was Roosevelt and the New Deal. Even Wilson and Hadley, the independent Republicans, clung to the President's coattails. Though they ran in the primaries of both parties, Wilson and Hadley realized that their fortunes lay with the Democrats. While they were all but assured the Democratic nominations, it appeared that Vare still had enough influence in the GOP to carry his slate to victory.

\(^{37}\) Ledger, Sept. 19, 1933.

\(^{38}\) The number of registered Democrats, which had never exceeded 40,000 in municipal election years, soared to almost 180,000 in 1933. The highest previous number of registered Democrats had been in 1928, when the figure was 102,000.

\(^{39}\) Record, July 29, 1933.
Wilson and Hadley even changed their party registrations and enrolled as Democrats. They took this action in order to conform to a recent order issued by Guffey. He had told all local Democratic organizations in the state that they were not to support any candidates for office unless they were bona fide Democrats. Registering Democratic was not difficult for Wilson. He had no deep loyalty to the GOP and had supported Roosevelt in 1932; but Hadley was a lifelong Republican, and had always voted that party’s ticket. He explained his change in registration as his means of showing “appreciation and endorsement of the epochal and progressive policies of President Roosevelt and the Democratic Party.”

Wilson did most of the campaigning for the IDCC in the primary. He was an excellent stump-speaker with a charismatic, even demagogic, appeal. One of his associates considered him a spellbinder. “He prevailed through the sheer force of his personality. You couldn’t talk to him, an audience couldn’t sit there and listen to him, without just being won over.” In his speeches, Wilson combined his own personal style of demagogery with ample references to Roosevelt and the New Deal. He promised “to bring the New Deal to Philadelphia.” Once in office, he declared, he would be moved by no other motive “except the duty of reflecting the same sound, courageous and enlightened policies which are motivating the actions of our great President in his heroic efforts to rout the depression and lift the people of this nation from the slough of economic despondency.”

Since his political life was at stake, O’Donnell put a great deal of effort into the primary campaign. His main attack was reserved for Wilson and Hadley, whom he charged were part of a “Pinchot plot” to take over the Philadelphia Democratic Party. As evidence of Wilson’s connections with the governor, O’Donnell cited his management of Pinchot’s primary campaign in 1930 and his appointment as controller after Hadley’s resignation. O’Donnell declared that only candidates who were “real Democrats,” and not “Pinchotcrats,” should be nominated. He charged that the entire IDCC slate was “but political straw men acting in the interests of and con-

40 Ibid., Aug. 14, 24, 1933.
41 Sharfsin interview.
42 Ledger, Aug. 25, 1933.
trolled by the Governor of Pennsylvania,” who was “a fanatical prohibitionist.”

Charges of a “Pinchot plot” to take over the Democratic Party, or allegations that the governor was scheming with Wilson and Hadley to establish his own independent political organization in the city, were often made by O’Donnell during the primary campaign. Republican speakers continued to voice these charges throughout the general election campaign. Precisely what the governor’s goals were, and why they would have been so terrible for Philadelphia, was never spelled out. Pinchot’s general unpopularity in the city, when added to his “dry” stand on the prohibition question and the support he received from rural areas and fanatical church groups, probably made him a likely bugbear to bring up when trying to dissuade independent Republicans from defecting to the Democrats.

There is no doubt that Pinchot was up to something. He supported Wilson and Hadley in both the primary and general elections. It was also obvious that his appointment of Wilson to succeed Hadley as controller was intended to help Wilson in the fall campaign. There is, however, no evidence that the Democrats were working with Pinchot, or that they would permit him to take advantage of the Philadelphia political situation. The way in which the Democrats handled an attempted fusion movement with the Pinchot Republicans shows their intentions.

The IDCC candidates smashed O’Donnell’s slate in the primary, amassing nearly 100,000 votes while O’Donnell’s ticket received less than 30,000. The Democrats had made their choice—O’Donnell was out. Guffey recognized Kelly as the new Democratic leader of Philadelphia and announced that all federal patronage would be distributed through the IDCC. O’Donnell remained chairman of the city committee, but that was now not much more than a titular position. He could not be removed until after the spring primaries.

43 Ibid., Sept. 8, 11, 13, 1933; Inquirer, Sept. 19, 1933.
44 Pinchot sent congratulatory telegrams to Wilson and Hadley after their election in November. Pinchot to Hadley, Pinchot to Wilson, Nov. 9, 1933, Gifford Pinchot Papers, Library of Congress.
45 Greenberg, 506–515.
46 Record, Sept. 24, 25, 1933.
47 Ibid., Sept. 27, 1933.
The Pinchot Republicans may have planned to take advantage of Wilson’s and Hadley’s popularity by placing their names at the head of a ticket consisting of Pinchotites, but the Democrats prevented it. Fusion with the Town Meeting party, the name pre-empted by the governor’s followers for the general election, would have required that the Democratic candidates for register of wills and coroner withdraw in favor of independent Republicans, which they refused to do. There was no fusion in Philadelphia in 1933. The Town Meeting slate was identical to the Democratic ticket, except for the magistrate candidates. The Democrats made no deals for offices or patronage with the Town Meeting party.

With Democratic registration markedly increased and the popularity of the New Deal adding more voters to the party’s following each day, the Democrats did not think there was any reason to make a deal with the Pinchotites. The IDCC issued a statement declaring that it “frowned upon” the idea of fusion. Support from a party pre-empted by independent Republicans would be welcomed, it said, as long as they would name as their candidates the ones nominated in the Democratic primary. The IDCC said that it would not permit another party to place Wilson and Hadley at the top of its ticket in order to elect its own candidates to the other offices. “It must be a case of all or none; no group will be permitted to take part of the Democratic ticket and use it as a kite to carry other candidates.”

When they accepted the support of the Town Meeting party, the four Democratic row office candidates—Wilson, Hadley, Dougherty and Minnick—issued a statement reaffirming their “absolute allegiance to the Democratic party.” They asked all citizens “who desire a new deal in Philadelphia to vote the straight Democratic ticket.” They said that they would welcome support from all political groups, but that they did not want the backing of the Town Meeting party “to be misinterpreted as in any way affecting our allegiance to the Democratic party and all candidates on the Democratic ticket. We have made no promises or commitments to any other party, group or individual.”

Two weeks after his disastrous defeat in the primary, O’Donnell

48 Ibid.
49 Ledger, Oct. 5, 1933.
received an unexpected break. Tom Minnick, the IDCC candidate nominated for coroner in the primary, withdrew from the race. He explained that if elected he would have to give up his private legal practice, which would place a serious financial strain on him. Under Democratic Party rules, when a candidate withdraws from the contest after having been nominated at the primary, the city committee is empowered to select his successor. Since O’Donnell still controlled the city committee, he was able to select one of his supporters, Charles H. Hersch, as the new candidate for coroner. Even though Hersch was O’Donnell’s man, the IDCC supported him. Kelly cited the legality of the action under the party rules and the desire for harmony as his reasons for accepting Hersch.

The results of the Republican primary showed the weakness of the Vare slate. Its candidates were nominated, but not by large majorities. It was clear that the Republicans would have to bolster their ticket for the general election. The first action they took was to force Edward Merchant, their candidate for controller, to withdraw from the race. Merchant had proved an unfortunate choice for the Republicans. One of Vare’s bitterest factional enemies, former Congressman Benjamin M. Golder, found evidence of financial wrongdoing in Merchant’s handling of funds while he was secretary for the Board of Education. Golder’s charges were so well documented that the Board of Education was forced to hold an open hearing on the subject. Evidence revealed at the hearing showed even more instances of Merchant’s malfeasance.

Although he won the primary, Merchant was a weak candidate and had hurt the entire ticket. The Republicans had to find a new candidate for controller in the general election. They finally selected Chester N. Farr, Jr., a prominent attorney and a respected member of the community. Many independent Republicans had insisted that Vare name Farr.

There were also other factors lessening the Republican ticket’s chances for victory. One was Vare’s alienation of key ward leaders,

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50 Actually, Minnick had been attacked as ineligible to run because he did not live in the city. Although he listed his residence as a house in the fifteenth ward, he and his family lived in Montgomery County.

51 Record, Oct. 13, 17, 19, 1933.

52 Ibid., Oct. 4, 11, 1933.
many of whom defected to the Town Meeting party. Vare also offended many independent Republicans when he tried to dictate which judges were to be re-elected to Philadelphia's patronage-rich Municipal Court. Although most of the city's judges were powerful factors in politics, they usually conducted their activities clandestinely, for "Philadelphia likes to think of the judiciary as apart from politics." For this reason, the city had traditionally clung to the "sitting judge" principle. Incumbent judges were always re-elected; but in 1933 Bill Vare decided to defy this time-honored custom and "replace several judges with men of unquestioned loyalty to him."

Vare's greatest blunder of the campaign was his alienation of the city's black voters. In 1933 the Negroes, who had previously been the mainstay of the Republican machine, demanded that Vare slate more black candidates on the organization ticket. Not only did Vare refuse to yield to their demands, but he denied organization support to the city's only black magistrate, who was seeking re-election in 1933.

Edward W. Henry, the Republican leader of the thirtieth ward, was highly regarded by the city's black voters. They took pride in his being the city's only black ward leader and elected official. Henry demanded that Vare slate a black candidate for the Municipal Court in 1933. Vare was so angered by Henry's arrogance that he denied him a place on the organization slate in the primary. Henry was forced to seek renomination on his own.

Vare also ousted Henry as leader of the thirtieth ward. To replace him as magistrate and ward leader, Vare selected another black, John C. Asbury. Although he was a loyal organization man, Asbury was not popular with the city's blacks. One black politician told a member of the Vare organization that over 90 per cent of the Negro voters found Asbury repulsive. They considered him an organization lackey and were offended by his presence on the Republican ticket.

Henry ran in both the Republican and Democratic primaries, but lost the GOP contest to Asbury. The Democrats, however, sensing

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54 Ibid., 230–232.
55 *Tribune*, July 27, 1933.
56 John M. Marquess to James M. Beck, Nov. 11, 1933, James M. Beck Papers, Princeton University.
an opportunity to make inroads with the black voters, supported Henry, and he was nominated on the IDCC magistrate slate. The Town Meeting party also placed Henry on its ticket. In the general election, Henry's vote was the highest received by any magistrate candidate. Asbury's was the lowest.\footnote{Salter, 232–233; \textit{Tribune}, Sept. 14, 21, 1933.}

The effect of Vare's actions can be seen by the increased Democratic vote among the blacks. In the voting divisions where blacks accounted for over 90 per cent of the voters, Roosevelt had received only 26 per cent of the votes in 1932. In 1933, these same voting divisions cast 45 per cent of their votes for the Democratic candidate for treasurer.\footnote{The figures for the black voting divisions were taken from the \textit{Twenty-Sixth Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia} (Philadelphia, 1932), and the \textit{Twenty-Seventh Annual Report of the Registration Commission for the City of Philadelphia} (Philadelphia, 1933).}

Although the Democrats attacked the Republicans for their corruption and charged that their extravagances had brought the city to the verge of bankruptcy, most of the Democratic campaign rhetoric applauded the accomplishments and promises of the New Deal. Roosevelt and recovery was the theme that the Democrats used to ride into office.

Jack Kelly, in particular, stressed this issue. Young, vigorous, full of hope and promise, Kelly symbolized the New Deal. As Republicans of an earlier era had waved the "bloody shirt" and used the protective tariff and sound money issues to arouse emotional support for their party, Kelly pointed to the New Deal. A vote for the Democratic ticket in November, he argued, was a vote for Roosevelt and the New Deal. A Republican victory, he warned, would be a serious blow to the federal recovery program, for "the whole philosophy of the Republican Organization in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia . . . is utterly and bitterly opposed to everything that the Roosevelt New Deal stands for." Kelly declared that it was essential for the Democrats to win this election because "the stand-pat Republican Tories of the Vare type are only waiting for signs of popular encouragement at the fall election in this city to lay down a withering attack on the national administration and the Roosevelt policies. That encouragement must not be given by the voters of this city."\footnote{\textit{Record}, Oct. 24, 27, 1933.}
Philadelphia, Kelly declared, must "enroll under the banner 'Forward with Roosevelt!' Let us do our bit for the President, who is doing his best for us."  

The Republican campaign warned of a "Pinchot conspiracy" to take over the Democratic Party and praised the accomplishments of the administration of Mayor J. Hampton Moore; but GOP speakers and newspapers had to spend most of their efforts in a futile attempt to deny that a Republican victory would be a set-back for the New Deal. One Republican campaigner charged that the Democratic ticket "was picked by Pinchot and handed to his allies, Joseph F. Guffey, of Pittsburgh, and Warren VanDyke, of Harrisburg, to stuff down the throats of Philadelphia voters with a fake issue, and that issue is that the efforts to restore national prosperity, in which we are all willing and anxious to cooperate, will be affected by the election of municipal officers in Philadelphia this year."  

The Inquirer, which strongly supported the Republican ticket in the campaign, used a large number of its editorial columns to refute the New Deal issue. It argued that there was no connection between the local elections in Philadelphia and the success of the Roosevelt programs in Washington. Nothing "more absurd in political campaigns was ever invented," charged the Inquirer, than the Democratic argument that a vote for Wilson and Hadley was a vote for the Roosevelt administration. "Local offices are local offices—local business offices—and nothing else." In another editorial, it declared that "The Roosevelt program has no more to do with Tuesday's balloting than has the most inconspicuous inhabitant of a South Seas Island."  

Chester Farr, the GOP candidate for controller, also tried to counter the New Deal issue. He decried the manner in which the Democrats were using Roosevelt's popularity to win votes. "Curing a depression," he argued, "is no one party's policy any more than is promoting prosperity. Every party, unless it is anarchistic, agrees that depressions must be cured and prosperity must be promoted."  

Farr denied that the GOP opposed the New Deal. "The Republican

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60 Ibid., Nov. 1, 1933.
61 Ledger, Oct. 18, 1933.
62 Inquirer, Oct. 29, Nov. 5, 6, 7, 1933.
party," he claimed, "has stood and proposes to stand back of the President in his program to combat the depression."

The claim that the Republican Party supported the Roosevelt program had a hollow sound in Philadelphia. James M. Beck, a Republican congressman from Philadelphia and a member of the Vare organization, "waged eloquent warfare on the principles and legislation of the New Deal's first 'Hundred Days'," voting against all of Roosevelt's proposals. Pennsylvania's senior United States Senator, David A. Reed, had also opposed all of the New Deal's measures.

Despite the Republican denials, there was also a relationship between the local contest and the New Deal. An item on the ballot asked that the city's debt limit be increased. The extension of the debt limit was essential if Philadelphia was to take part in the federal public works program. Under the Public Works Administration (PWA), the federal government paid for only 30 per cent of a project and financed the rest with a low-interest, long-term loan to the city where the work was done. Mayor Moore, however, was not enthusiastic about raising the city's debt limit. Not wishing to alienate those who favored public works, Moore did not formally come out against the item, but neither did he support it, as he did the other questions on the ballot. He admitted that the city could use some public work projects, but also warned "against more debt with annual carrying charges."

In early November, less than a week before the election, Moore's attitude toward federal public works projects was given wide publicity. The mayor and Secretary of the Interior Harold L. Ickes, who was federal administrator for PWA, addressed a dinner given by the Philadelphia Board of Trade. Moore spoke first. Realizing that there was ambivalence toward federal public works within the city's business community, Moore did not directly condemn PWA. Instead, he made some contradictory remarks attacking the manner in which

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63 Ledger, Oct. 27, Nov. 2, 1933.
PWA funds were distributed. He said that he did not think that this section of the country was receiving its fair share of these funds, but added that “he was proud that this city had not found it necessary to ask any help from the Federal Government.” After his speech, Moore left, refusing to stay and listen to Ickes.  

Ickes replied to the mayor in an open letter that was published in the city’s newspapers. Angered by the way Moore appeared to gloat over the fact that Philadelphia had not asked for any federal money, Ickes asked how it was then possible for the mayor to criticize PWA for not planning enough projects in this section of the country. How could the federal government grant funds to Philadelphia for public works projects, queried Ickes, when the city had never requested any? Mayor Moore, Ickes charged, had refused to cooperate with the federal government on any projects and had made it impossible for PWA to operate in Philadelphia. In a radio speech the night before the election, Kelly cited the facts outlined in Ickes’ letter as further proof of Republican opposition to Roosevelt’s recovery program.

The Democratic campaign proved successful. All four of the party’s row office candidates were elected, and the Democrats even elected a majority of the magistrates. The Democratic ticket alone received a plurality of 45,000 votes. Even without the additional 36,000 votes cast on the Town Meeting ticket, the Democratic candidates would have been elected. The Democratic ticket alone received a majority in twenty-one of the city’s forty-eight wards. The combined Democratic-Town Meeting slate accounted for a majority in an additional nine.

The election of 1933 marked the return of two-party politics to Philadelphia. In national, state, and municipal elections, the Democratic share of the city’s vote has never fallen below 40 per cent since that time. The Republican defeat that year led to the downfall of William S. Vare. Although the Republican machine continued to function and hold onto most of the municipal offices until 1951, Vare was no longer its leader. In June, 1934, a group of insurgents succeeded in ousting him from control of the city committee.

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66 Ledger, Nov. 4, 1933.
67 Ibid., Nov. 7, 1933; Record, Nov. 6, 1933.
68 For Vare’s downfall, see John T. Salter, “The End of Vare,” Political Science Quarterly, L (1935), 214–235.
The rejuvenation of the Philadelphia Democratic Party in 1933 marked the end of the road for John O'Donnell and the "kept minority." The Democratic electorate had increased tremendously, and most of the new members of the party opposed O'Donnell. All of the Democrats elected to office in 1933 or given federal jobs were obligated to Kelly and the IDCC, not O'Donnell. Though O'Donnell was not formally ousted as chairman of the city committee until June, 1934, it was clear by the end of 1933 that the independent Democrats dominated the party. The "kept minority" was dead.

Philadelphia

Irwin F. Greenberg

69 Even Charles H. Hersch, the man O'Donnell had selected to run for coroner when Minnick dropped out of the race after the primary, broke with the city committee chairman. Shortly after the election, Hersch announced that he had lined up with Kelly and the IDCC. Ledger, Dec. 7, 1933.