

Andrew Curtin and the Politics of Union

ABSTRACT: This article examines the elections and tenure of Governor Andrew Curtin of Pennsylvania, who secured election in 1860 and reelection in 1863 at the head of a centrist political coalition that first dubbed itself the People's Party and later became the Union Party. Although Republicans constituted the largest proportion of Curtin's supporters, his overall success hinged on Democrat and Whig converts who refused to back a straight Republican ticket. The governor appealed to these voters by embodying a nonpartisan patriotism in rhetoric and policy. His campaigns appealed across party lines to loyal Democrats, and in his governance he regularly clashed with Washington over a host of unpopular wartime policies. Curtin's record suggests the fluidity of Republicanism and provides powerful evidence for the underappreciated prevalence and significance of political centrism in wartime northern politics.

GOVERNORS RARELY FEATURE in standard narratives of the Civil War. Yet one, Pennsylvania's Andrew Gregg Curtin, secured a mention in Steven Spielberg's recent biopic, *Lincoln*. The president, wonderfully portrayed by Daniel Day-Lewis, engages in the political dark arts to corral unwilling Democrats to vote for the Thirteenth Amendment. Knowing that Governor Curtin was preparing to declare a winner in a disputed congressional election, Lincoln instructs his surrogates to ask the governor instead to refer the verdict to the House of Representatives. Tommy Lee Jones's perfectly caustic Thaddeus Stevens then informs the incumbent Democrat, Alexander Coffroth, that, once Congress controls the decision, "Coffdrop" will only retain his seat if he votes to end slavery.

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To remove any doubt over whether Governor Curtin would act on Lincoln's request, Stevens asks to which party the governor belongs, helping the trembling "Coffsnott" to spell out the answer: "Re . . . pub . . . li . . . can."¹

In casting Andrew Curtin as a Republican, the movie reflects a common simplification of Civil War-era politics in Pennsylvania. While Thaddeus Stevens and his fiercely antislavery Republicanism are well known, the same cannot be said of Andrew Curtin and his more centrist agenda. Yet Curtin better represented the politics of Pennsylvania. As James E. Harvey of the *Philadelphia North American* explained to Abraham Lincoln in the summer of 1860, "the political organization of Pennsylvania supporting you, is not strictly Republican." Harvey's clarification reflected the fact that Curtin won in Pennsylvania in 1860 for the People's Party and in 1863 for the Union Party, never running explicitly as a Republican. As Harvey informed Lincoln, "the largest infusion" in these parties was "Republican in character," but they campaigned under different labels for a reason. Republicans held power only as part of a larger coalition—one that eschewed the Republican label precisely to avoid association with the radical reputation of men like Thaddeus Stevens. Examining Andrew Curtin's elections and wartime career offers evidence of a type of genuinely centrist politics, the prevalence and importance of which has often gone underappreciated in scholarship on the Civil War.²

State-level studies have often recognized the role of moderates and conservatives in a Republican movement rooted in shifting coalitions, but a recent trend in work on the national Republican Party has depicted a more radical and united institution. Mark E. Neely has noted this shift, suggesting that "with the agenda of Radical Republicans . . . looking more attractive to modern historians, there has been a tendency to draw the president and the radical wing of the party closer together." This process has found its strongest voice in James Oakes's recent work, *Freedom National*.

¹ *Lincoln*, directed by Steven Spielberg (2012; Walt Disney Studios Home Entertainment, 2013), DVD. The last book-length study of Curtin is over a century old: William H. Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin: His Life and Services* (Philadelphia, 1895).

² James E. Harvey to Abraham Lincoln, June 5, 1860, available at *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, Manuscript Division (Washington, DC, 2000–01), <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html> (hereafter *Lincoln Papers*). The majority of the scholarship designates Curtin and the parties he led simply as Republicans. As a small sample: Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2005), 573; Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York, 1991), 57; William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Union Governors* (Carbondale, IL, 2013), 7.

Oakes has described the Republican Party—before and during the war—as unwavering in its determination to achieve the moral goal of destroying slavery. Republicans did not have to navigate a move from a war for Union to a war for emancipation because “the two issues—liberty and union—were never separate for them.” He argues that the only shift that took place during the war was “the realization by Republicans that destroying slavery would be much harder than they originally expected.” Pennsylvania’s politics are poorly reflected in such assertions. Curtin’s successes suggest that the strength of the Republican Party lay in its being loosely cohered, often taking different ideological and organizational forms in each state. Outside of New England and Congress—where radical Republicans controlled several key committees—the party’s driving force often came from centrists.³

Northern politicians like Curtin aimed their appeals at a vast and fluid middle ground that existed between the perceived extremes of radical Republicans and antiwar Democrats sympathetic to the South. The national political center consisted of conservative Republicans, war-supporting and generally antislavery Democrats, and a significant number of former Whigs who had formed the basis of Millard Fillmore’s Northern support in 1856 and John Bell’s in 1860. Many of these voters had switched allegiances with each election cycle during the 1850s, as old parties collapsed and new ones emerged with stunning frequency. The outbreak of sectional conflict only increased instability, leading such newspapers as the *New York World* to proclaim that “the sword of war has severed, deep and final, old party lines,” leaving a broad tranche of unattached or only loosely affiliated voters.⁴

³This process probably began with Eric Foner’s canonical *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970), which brilliantly dissects the various groups and ideologies that came together under the Republican umbrella but overstates the extent to which these coalesced into an organizationally and ideologically united whole by 1860. Mark E. Neely, “Politics Purified: Religion and the Growth of Antislavery Idealism in Republican Ideology during the Civil War,” in *The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation*, ed. Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller (Philadelphia, 2002), 105–6; James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861–1865* (New York, 2014), xxii–xxiii. For a work focused on the complexity of party politics and the importance of conservatism, see Adam I. P. Smith, *No Party Now: Politics in the Civil War North* (New York, 2006). For older state studies of Pennsylvania, see Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1905); Stanton Ling Davis, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1860–1863* (Cleveland, OH, 1935); and Erwin Stanley Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism: A Study of Pennsylvania and Presidential Politics, 1860–1872* (Philadelphia, 1964).

⁴“Republican State Convention,” *New York World*, Sept. 30, 1862.

While spread across multiple loose partisan affiliations, political centrists shared much in common during the war, including the label “conservative.” Eric Foner defined conservative Republicans as those whose “devotion to the Union was the cornerstone of their political outlook,” and who believed that “party and sectional considerations must give way if the integrity of the Union were in danger.” While accurate, this applied to many conservatives who refused to embrace the Republican Party precisely because they saw its perceived acceptance of abolitionism and solely sectional support as a threat to the Union. Most conservative voters shared the almost universal Northern belief in the superiority of a free society, but this did not prevent them abhorring abolitionists and secessionists almost equally for their willingness to risk breaking up the Union over questions of slavery. When war began, conservatives supported a conflict solely for the purpose of restoring the Union. Within these commonalities, differences certainly existed: Republicans proved most able to accept emancipation as a necessary *means* to victory, Democrats worried most fervently about increased infringements on civil liberties, and old Whigs retained hope that compromise might still offer possibilities for reunion. Despite their diversity, this conglomerate still constituted a recognizable political center.⁵

Andrew Curtin sought a formula to reach all such centrist voters and to alienate none. Looking at Curtin’s role in military recruitment, historian William Blair has asserted that the governor failed to articulate “any political ideology.” We may better comprehend Curtin by understanding that he consistently advocated a type of Unionism that sought to enlarge the scope of Republicanism to better appeal to the political center. Within his Republican-dominated coalition, Curtin was known as a “representative of the conservative wing,” simultaneously marking him as a centrist within the larger electorate. In 1860, Curtin largely excised the two most divisive elements of Republican ideology—antislavery and anti-Southernism—from his campaign. Once the war began, Curtin sought to turn patriotism into policy, focusing relentlessly on his fealty to the nation and to the soldiers who fought to protect it. To try and capture all those who supported the Union war for the Union political party, Curtin chose, in his own words, to “avoid the discussion of the policy of the general government, while

⁵Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 187. For a much fuller account of conservatism in the Civil War era, see the forthcoming work: Adam I. P. Smith, *The Stormy Present: Conservatism and American Politics in an Age of Revolution, 1848–1877* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017).

giving a hearty support to the national authorities in all their measures to suppress the rebellion.” In particular, this meant refusing to embrace emancipation on its own terms. The vast majority of the Northern population supported a war to save the Union, only a minority of whom identified with Republicanism or with a conflict waged to free the slaves. In his third annual message, delivered six days after Lincoln’s final Emancipation Proclamation, Curtin made no mention of the president’s historic document, simply restating the determination of Pennsylvanians to “preserve the government.” As the war took ever more dramatic policy turns, Curtin showed his brand of independent politics by either criticizing measures or accepting them solely as military necessities. He hoped that his actions resonated with the largest proportion of Pennsylvania’s electorate.⁶

Curtin’s brand of Unionism helped attract sufficient numbers of voters outside of the Republican base to secure success in Pennsylvania. In 1860, Curtin received the backing of the most high-profile figure in the state’s Constitutional Union Party, Philadelphia mayor Alexander Henry. John Forney, an influential Douglas Democrat, crossed the aisle after the 1860 election and would be joined by others, including the speaker of the Pennsylvania House, John Cessna, during the course of the war. More important but less prominent were the average conservatives in Pennsylvania who, after backing James Buchanan or Millard Fillmore in 1856, swung the state toward Lincoln and Curtin in 1860 and beyond. This essay will outline the principles and tactics that Curtin employed to reach such voters.

While some scholars have shied away from seeing Unionism as an ideology, it is a useful lens through which to view Curtin’s actions. Gary W. Gallagher and Elizabeth R. Varon, among other scholars, have reminded us why “Union” served as the most emotive word in the nineteenth-century American lexicon. It conjured the founding generation and its fragile experiment in self-government, which now offered Americans unprecedented levels of economic opportunity and social mobility. This thriving “city on a hill” served as a beacon for democracy

⁶ William Blair, “We are Coming, Father Abraham—Eventually: The Problem of Northern Nationalism in the Pennsylvania Recruiting Drives of 1862,” in *The War was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War*, ed. Joan E. Cashin (Princeton, NJ, 2002), 205; “The Pennsylvania Election and the Local Issues,” *New York Herald*, Oct. 11, 1860, accessed online through America’s Historical Newspapers at <http://www.readex.com/content/americas-historical-newspapers>, hereafter America’s Historical Newspapers; Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 199; George Edward Reed, ed., *Papers of the Governors, 1681–1902*, vol. 8, 1858–1871 (Harrisburg, PA, 1902), 469.

in a Western world made dark by the tyrannical monarchies of Europe. Within these shared resonances, Rogan Kersh has found clear distinctions between those who argued for a “moral” Union—purged of the sin of slavery—and those who stressed a “sustainable” one. The *sine qua non* of those who, like Curtin, stressed a “sustainable” Union was that the Union represented, in and of itself, the highest moral cause. The power of appeals to Union took institutional shape in the numerous Union parties—including in Pennsylvania—that formed during the war. Historians have not always recognized that these Union parties represented honest attempts to forge more inclusive political movements premised on the most widespread and deeply held allegiance within the nation.⁷

Charting Curtin’s tenure also demonstrates the inadequacy of interpretations that cast the war years as a time when “national government was paramount” and state executives “yielded” to President Lincoln’s federal juggernaut. The war brought increased power and responsibility to government at both the federal and state levels. Curtin regularly used his independent authority to challenge national policy and to cater to the needs of a home front rent by war. Curtin’s actions in these cases, motivated by conviction and calculation, served his political interests. Whether protesting quota calculations and recruitment conditions, reprimanding the president for military arrests, or setting up state funds to care for soldiers’ families, Curtin believed he acted to meet his governing responsibilities and to bolster his image as an independent executive, serving state and nation before party. Undoubtedly, Curtin was a savvy politician, and politics is always a dual enterprise: trying to balance an adherence to personal principles with the need to secure electoral majorities.⁸

⁷ For the significance of Union before and during the war, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the American Civil War, 1789–1859* (Chapel Hill, 2008); and Rogan Kersh, *Dreams of a More Perfect Union* (Ithaca, NY, 2001), 165. Michael F. Holt has written of the formation of Union parties that “most historians, echoing contemporary Democrats, have regarded this action as a transparently cosmetic attempt by cynical Republicans to lure gullible Democrats and Unionists.” Michael F. Holt, “Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Union,” in Holt, *Political Parties and American Political Development from the Age of Jackson to the Age of Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1992), 338.

⁸ Heather Cox Richardson, *To Make Men Free: A History of the Republican Party* (New York, 2014), 50; W. B. Hesseltine, *Lincoln and the War Governors* (New York, 1948), 274; for another similar perspective, see Laura F. Edwards, *A Legal History of the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Nation of Rights* (New York, 2015), 3. Curtin’s clashes with the War Department led Jonathan W. White to label Curtin a “state-centered nationalist.” Jonathan W. White, *Emancipation, The Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2014), 26. The prevailing depiction of states and governors who yielded to the federal government owed much to historian William Hesseltine, whose 1948 book

A Complex Political Spectrum

To grasp why Curtin's positions resonated, we must briefly sketch the political geography of Pennsylvania. While the Republican *Boston Daily Advertiser* expressed in 1860 the common view that Pennsylvania was the "most conservative . . . of the Middle States," this did not negate the fact that all shades of opinion existed within its borders. At the left end stood a small but determined constituency of white and free black immediatists led by the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and strongest in Philadelphia, where the influential African American newspaper the *Christian Recorder* was published. While politicians of Curtin's ilk fell well short of their ideal, the unpalatable Democratic alternative ensured that most immediatists adhered to Pennsylvania's Union Party.⁹

The state also boasted such prominent radical Republicans as Thaddeus Stevens, as well as many more equally committed moderate Republicans. These voters tended to have firm antislavery views and to have joined the Republican Party early. Concentrated in the western and northern counties, they formed the basis of the 32 percent of Pennsylvania's votes that John Fremont captured in 1856, providing majorities in all the counties from Washington up to Erie and along the northern border to Susquehanna. Confirming work on the relationship between evangelical Protestant sects and the fledgling Republican Party, this region also contained a majority of the counties most populated with Presbyterian churches, fourteen out of seventeen of which backed Curtin in 1860. The industrial city of Pittsburgh served as the hub of Republicanism in this region. When speaking there in 1860, Curtin's remarks caused "pandemonium" because they "did not come up to the standard of our anti-slavery thought." Pittsburgh's strong Republican identity also reflected the fact that the party had strong attachments to the state's railroad industries and the iron and steel manufacturers that supported it. These areas proffered large majorities to the People's and Union parties, with many moderate Republicans clearly backing Curtin. Radicals backed the governor more

cited above remained the only major work on northern governors until very recently. William Harris and particularly Stephen Engle have begun the process of recovering the vital and active role played by state executives. Engle powerfully demonstrates governors' centrality to the Union military effort. See William C. Harris, *Lincoln and the Union Governors* (Carbondale, IL, 2013); Stephen D. Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation: Lincoln and the Union's War Governors* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2016).

⁹ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Oct. 8, 1860, 2. For the history of abolitionism in Philadelphia, see Richard Newman and James Mueller, eds., *Antislavery and Abolition in Philadelphia: Emancipation and the Long Struggle for Racial Justice in the City of Brotherly Love* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2011).

grudgingly and resented abandoning their party label, often continuing to refer to themselves as Republicans.¹⁰

The groups to which Curtin most consistently tailored his message consisted of Pennsylvania's political center, made up of conservative Republicans, former Whigs, Know-Nothings, and Constitutional Unionists, as well as fervently prowar Democrats after Fort Sumter. Many of these voters had deemed the Republican Party of 1856, led by John Fremont, as too radical. As a result, they had helped secure 18 percent of Pennsylvania's vote for the last Whig president, Millard Fillmore, then running on the American Party ticket. While the Whig Party collapsed in the 1850s, Whigs remained. These conservatives became, in Adam I. P. Smith's words, the "swing voters of the Civil War era," whose allegiance had to be earned. As a member of the People's Party explained to President Lincoln in January 1861, the "Party is not composed of Republicans alone, nor even in great part . . . I am not a Republican, but an Old Line Whig, with strong American proclivities." Appealing to these voters meant playing down questions of slavery in favor of the tariff and preservation of the Union. Curtin's success with this conservative constituency shone through in winning a majority of the counties that had placed Fremont third behind Fillmore in 1856. These included Curtin's home county of Centre and Philadelphia, which had given Fremont only 10 and 11 percent respectively. Philadelphia, easily the state's most populous and prosperous city, represented a particular coup for the People's Party and was acknowledged as an organizational hub for Curtin and his allies. These dramatic victories stretched the party's strength beyond the Republican base into the state's middle and southeastern counties.¹¹

The Democratic Party's heartland lay in regions along the southern border with Virginia, and particularly along the eastern border with New Jersey and the anthracite mining counties in the northeastern part of the state. The mining regions tended to have high numbers of foreign-born laborers, a constituency that voted overwhelmingly Democratic. Working men in general leaned toward the Democracy, especially the

¹⁰ Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 446. On links between evangelicals and Republicans in this period, see Richard J. Carwardine, *Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America* (Knoxville, TN, 1997), 235–323; for Presbyterians and Republicanism in Pennsylvania, see William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York, 1987), 541; and Michael F. Holt, *Forging a Majority: The Formation of the Republican Party in Pittsburgh, 1848–1860* (Pittsburgh, 1990), 354.

¹¹ R. P. King to Abraham Lincoln, Jan. 18, 1861, Lincoln Papers; John W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, Jan. 13, 1861, Lincoln Papers.

Irish. Pennsylvania's more than 200,000 Irish residents made up over half the state's foreign-born population, and Democratic politicians assiduously targeted the votes of Irish men. As crude but suggestive indicators of how class and ethnicity factored into political allegiance, four of the five counties with the highest real and personal property values voted for Curtin, compared to only one of the bottom five. Four of the seven counties with the highest foreign-born populations supported the Democrats, as did six of the ten counties with the highest number of Catholic churches. Pennsylvania's Democrats would struggle over how far to support the war, but they nonetheless continued to run competitively throughout the state.¹²

Before the War

Andrew Curtin came from prosperous and prominent stock. His grandfather, Andrew Gregg, served as a Pennsylvania senator during James Madison's presidency, and his father enjoyed a successful career as an iron manufacturer. Trained as a lawyer at Dickinson College, Curtin was admitted to the bar in 1839. While practicing, he spoke widely for Whig candidates throughout the 1840s. When the Pennsylvania Whigs collapsed in the mid-1850s, Curtin, a Presbyterian with old Irish roots, competed unsuccessfully for the 1855 senate nomination from Pennsylvania's Know-Nothing-controlled legislature. The large Irish and German populations of the Keystone State certainly bolstered nativist appeals, but the Know-Nothings also seemed fleetingly to be the only national alternative to the Democrats. Curtin's dalliance with nativism may have helped him once the Know-Nothings became subsumed under his leadership in the People's Party.

The 1855 senate contest also initiated a bitter feud with the Machiavellian former Democrat Simon Cameron. This divide would mark a major fault line in Pennsylvania politics for decades. At some point during the maneuvering for the nomination, the two clashed, possibly over a drunken insin-

¹²Pennsylvania's political geography and information of the breakdown by county of ethnicity, wealth, industry, and religiosity is all based on analysis of the 1860 federal census in comparison with election data taken from tables in Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 355; Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism*, 424–29; and Michael J. Dubin, *United States Gubernatorial Elections, 1776–1860: The Official Results by State and County* (Jefferson, NC, 2003). Unless otherwise stated, all newspapers accessed online through Pennsylvania Civil War Era Newspapers at Pennsylvania State University Library, available at <http://digitalnewspapers.libraries.psu.edu/Olive/APA/CivilWar/?skin=civilwar#panel=home>.

uation that Curtin had fathered an illegitimate child.¹³ While they would soon become the two most influential figures in the People's Party, they would remain deeply estranged personally. While the split forced political players to choose sides, it took time for the division to take on an ideological rather than personal character. But especially after war broke out, Cameron became aligned with the more strongly Republican elements within the state, aiding in their attacks on Curtin and attempts to replace the governor with the radical John Covode in 1863.¹⁴

1860: "The Keystone of the Republican Arch"

The 1860 gubernatorial canvass offers a powerful picture of the ideological tenor of the People's Party. Meeting on February 23, 1860, in Harrisburg, the People's Party convention adopted a fascinating array of resolutions. By endorsing a homestead bill and a higher tariff and in stating their heartfelt "opposition to the extension of slavery," convention attendees sounded Republican. But they catered firmly to conservatives by "promising to defend the constitutional rights" of their Southern "brethren" and damning "fanaticism . . . in the form of Northern abolitionism or Southern slavery propagandism." Referring to their organization as an "affiliate" of the Republican Party, they sought to clarify that the Republicans would never interfere with slavery where it currently existed. Know-Nothings gained resolutions protesting the "influx of foreign criminals." When endorsing Curtin's nomination, they proclaimed his "devotion to the Protection of American Industry . . . and his earnest fidelity to the interests of the labor of white men." Curtin, apparently unwilling to vote for Fremont in 1856 and known to oppose the "radicalism of the Republican Party," made the perfect centrist candidate.¹⁵

At the May 1860 Republican convention in Chicago, the People's Party delegates wielded considerable influence but also incurred attacks for their unwillingness to run as Republicans. Early in proceedings, Pennsylvanian

¹³ Alexander McClure suggests only a drunken insult. Cameron's biographer suggests the paternity story. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 1:387; Erwin Stanley Bradley, *Simon Cameron, Lincoln's Secretary of War: A Political Biography* (Philadelphia, 1966), 102.

¹⁴ McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 1:387. The perception of Cameron as a radical was significantly enhanced after Lincoln recalled his report as secretary of war in December 1861, recommending the arming of slaves. See Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism*, 150, 186.

¹⁵ "The People's State Convention," *Lehigh (PA) Register*, Feb. 29, 1860; "Mr. Curtin Affiliating with Giddings at Chicago," *Republican Compiler*, May 28, 1860.

David Wilmot suggested that the delegates from Maryland and Texas should not be granted voting rights. Mr. Chandler of Texas quickly retorted, to cheers from the audience, that those from the Keystone State should “Organize yourselves and train under the Republican banner before you accuse us in Texas of not having a Republican organization.”¹⁶ While the Southerners’ charges found sympathy, Pennsylvania’s electoral votes held the key to the presidential election. Curtin believed that William Seward’s past record deemed him too antislavery and pro-immigrant for the tastes of the Keystone State. Using their electoral votes as leverage, Curtin and his followers helped to defeat Seward’s nomination and secure a tariff plank in the national platform. With these goals achieved, Curtin now looked to his own race with renewed optimism.¹⁷

Focusing on the tariff served both to hurt the Democrats and hold the People’s Party coalition together. The panic of 1857 had particularly hurt Pennsylvania’s iron and railroad industries and helped generate almost universal support for a higher protective tariff. This suited Curtin since, with the Constitutional Union Party also now competing for conservative votes, he did not wish to get drawn into the divisive slavery question. Simply attending the Republican national convention had the effect of “souring the ‘Bell’ portion of the Americans” in Philadelphia.¹⁸ As Philadelphian Francis Blackburn explained in a letter to incoming President Lincoln, “the Party in Pennsylvania are thoroughly AntiAbolitionist and it is with difficulty we can keep them solid with the Republican Party.” Blackburn stated incorrectly that the entire party was anti-abolition, but his opinion reflected a real divide. McClure described the contours of the state more accurately, noting that in the “Eastern, Southern, & Central counties” where “the Conservative element predominates . . . the Tariff will be the overshadowing question . . . while in the West the Tariff is regarded as of no greater importance than the Slave Aggressions; and in the North . . . the great question of Freedom overshadows all others.” Thaddeus Stevens and other radical Republicans would cater to crowds in strongly antislavery regions while Curtin, a devoted Whig and disciple of Henry Clay, spoke earnestly of his long and well-known commitment to the protection of

¹⁶ *Proceedings of the Republican National Convention, Held at Chicago, May 16, 17 and 18, 1860* (Albany, NY, 1860), 49–65, accessed online through HathiTrust Digital Library, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiuo.ark:/13960/t4xg9n354;view=1up;seq=1>.

¹⁷ See McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 1:399–415; Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, 241–42.

¹⁸ See Russell Errett to Joseph Medill, July 24, 1860, Lincoln Papers.

industry. His Democratic opponent, Henry Foster, struggled desperately to proclaim his earnest support for a high tariff despite the fact that his Democratic colleagues in Congress and the White House had consistently blocked such a measure.¹⁹

Curtin's approach also helped refute Democratic attempts to raise the specter of disunion. Democratic newspapers eagerly branded the People's Party the "Black Republican Party," led by "Andy Curtin and Abolition Republican Sectionalism." In response, Curtin lauded the People's Party's "platform of principles eminently conservative."²⁰ Asserting his fraternal warmth for the sister states of the South, he envisioned a harmonious future where all parts of the country would thrive in concert. Speaking in Philadelphia, he employed a tactic he would use repeatedly during the war as he proclaimed: "That Constitution we so much admire and cherish was made in this City; the Declaration of Independence was first written here . . . and from that time to the present the people of Philadelphia and of the state at large, have ever been loyal to both."²¹ Curtin invoked the founders to broaden his appeal by chaining his party to the unimpeachable cause of Union.

On October 6, 1860, the *New York Times* reported that Pennsylvania's result "would be widely regarded as deciding the Presidential contest." Lincoln followed events closely, requesting and receiving regular updates. Curtin's success, by a majority of 32,114 of the close to 500,000 votes cast, settled Republican nerves. While some Constitutional Union newspapers had defected late in the campaign to support Foster, McClure felt assured that they held "the bulk of the Bell vote for Curtin," especially helping them to a majority in Philadelphia. Democrats hoped that "thousands of conservative men who voted for Curtin will not vote for the Abolitionist Lincoln," but, foreseeing defeat, the Democratic vote dropped off considerably. The *New York Herald* even claimed that the People's Party triumphed because "the vote of the Douglas democracy of Pennsylvania, to a great extent, was cast directly for Curtin." The *Herald* certainly exaggerated, but its coverage reflected the fact that, while he would not officially convert until after the election, John Forney—a journalist, politician, and Douglas's most prominent surrogate in Pennsylvania—was privately known to be working for

¹⁹ Francis Blackburn to Abraham Lincoln, Nov. 24, 1860, and Alexander K. McClure to Abraham Lincoln, June 16, 1860, both Lincoln Papers; analysis of the tariff issue draws on Holt, *Forging a Majority*, 243, 275–80; Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, 173–76.

²⁰ "Our Nominee for Congress," *Huntingdon (PA) Globe*, Sept. 26, 1860; "Important Speech of Col. A. G. Curtin," *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 5, 1860.

²¹ "Serenade to Col. Curtin," *Lehigh (PA) Register*, Aug. 1, 1860.

Curtin's cause. Forney undoubtedly took some voters with him, and he would not be the last notable Democrat to abandon his allegiance.²²

Preceding Lincoln's campaign by a month, Curtin's victory was a vital precursor to gaining the White House. His election demonstrates the importance that a conservative, centrist message played in defeating Democrats in 1860. As the *New York Times* explained, Pennsylvania was "the Keystone of the Republican Arch," but "the slavery question has much less to do with this canvass. . . . Indeed . . . we have serious doubts whether it is not an element of weakness rather than strength." While Republicans formed the majority, the People's Party secured critical swing voters thanks to the diversity of its policy priorities and membership. It provided a vital foundation for the wartime Union Party.²³

The First Term: "To Maintain the Union at all Hazards"

From his election in October to the firing on Fort Sumter in April, Curtin adopted a consistently firm but conciliatory tone, placing him at the conservative end of the Republican coalition. Taking office in the midst of national crisis, the governor's inaugural address on January 15, 1861, sought to reassure Southerners but left no doubt over the inviolability of the Union. He stressed that Pennsylvania, tied to its cherished Southern neighbors by "extensive commerce" and "kindred and social intercourse," recognized "in their broadest extent, all our constitutional obligations." Only when it came to ending his speech did Curtin borrow a phrase suggested by President-Elect Lincoln to add a warning to the fledgling Confederacy, stating bluntly that "Ours is a National Government" and that "the people mean to preserve the integrity of the National Union at every hazard." Curtin's speech, recognized as an attempt to ease Southern concerns without pandering to Southern demands, drew praise from across the political spectrum.²⁴

²²"The Pennsylvania Election," *New York Times*, Oct. 6, 1860; Alexander K. McClure to Abraham Lincoln, Aug. 21, 1860, Lincoln Papers; "Don't Give up the Ship," *Democrat & Sentinel*, Oct. 24, 1860; "The Question of Lincoln's Administration," *New York Herald*, Oct. 20, 1860, Early American Newspapers; for evidence of Forney's pre-election conversion, see Russell Errett to David Davis, Aug. 27, 1860, and David Wilmot to Abraham Lincoln, July 11, 1860, both Lincoln Papers.

²³The Presidency—the Forlorn Hope of the Democracy," *New York Times*, Oct. 12, 1860.

²⁴Reed, *Papers of the Governors*, 8:331, 336. Curtin had written to Lincoln asking if there was anything he wished conveyed. Lincoln responded only that Curtin might communicate "the purpose of yourself, and your state to maintain the Union at all hazards." Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Curtin, Dec. 21, 1860, Lincoln Papers.

As attempts to reach a compromise with the South developed, Curtin showed himself willing to stretch beyond pure Republican principles. Nationally, hopes for compromise rested on Senator John Crittenden's proposals and on the Washington peace conference, meeting in February 1861. Republican radicals were deeply suspicious of the event, urging their states not to participate. Curtin sent seven delegates, who, with the notable exception of David Wilmot, were of a conservative bent. These men made Pennsylvania one of only four Northern states to vote for every provision, including extending the Missouri Compromise line to the Pacific coast—a feature of Crittenden's plan and an explicit repudiation of the Republican Party platform. Governor Oliver Morton of Indiana even wrote to President Lincoln of his fears that Pennsylvania's willingness to accept the Crittenden Compromise put at risk the "integrity and future of the Republican party." Despite fervent efforts, Congress firmly rejected these attempts at conciliation.²⁵

Once shots were fired over Fort Sumter, Curtin quickly acted to form as inclusive a governing coalition as possible, identifying soldiers as the perfect manifestation of Union and of his message. Curtin's identification with the troops operated throughout his tenure as both an electoral appeal and a governing strategy. Supporting the soldiers was universally acceptable. Radicals in his own coalition could not object, and it offered no ideological barrier to prowar Democrats tempted to cross the aisle. As a pitch to voters, it embodied a unifying patriotism. As a *modus operandi* for administering his state, it brought regular and increasing conflict with the War Department. In his confrontations with Secretaries Cameron and Stanton, Curtin forcefully stressed his legal rights as Pennsylvania's chief executive and the unofficial political leverage that his position granted.

In the first months of the war, Curtin outshone his War Department foe, Simon Cameron, in harnessing the initial rush of patriotism. When Washington would accept no more soldiers, Curtin persuaded the state legislature to organize and maintain fifteen additional regiments—the Pennsylvania Reserves. Another call for men soon vindicated Curtin's actions. As recruiting in Pennsylvania continued apace, Curtin discovered that Cameron had sent individuals into the state with War Department

²⁵ Robert Gray Gunderson, *Old Gentlemen's Convention: The Washington Peace Conference of 1861* (Madison, WI, 1961), 38, 90; Oliver P. Morton to Abraham Lincoln, Jan. 29, 1861, Lincoln Papers.

authority to privately enlist volunteers. Curtin immediately wrote to President Lincoln, who intervened to stop Cameron's scheme and ensure that all authority over Pennsylvania regiments rested with the governor.²⁶

The removal of Cameron in January 1862 failed to prevent Curtin clashing with the War Department over recruitment. New secretary Edwin Stanton ordered that all new troops should be three-year enlistments and complained to President Lincoln when Curtin continued to accept men for nine- and twelve-month terms. While Lincoln shared Stanton's aim, he nonetheless decided that the soldiers must be accepted; otherwise, he reasoned, "we shall fail perhaps to get any on other terms from Pennsylvania."²⁷ Curtin next went over Stanton's head to protest general order 154, which gave federal recruiting officers the authority to fill up regiments by drawing from state reserve units. Curtin deemed this order "unjust to the people of the States & calculated to demoralize and destroy volunteer organizations." Lincoln passed the letter to Stanton, who complained that the governor's protest was "ill advised, revolutionary and tends to excite discontent and mutiny in the army and in my judgment should be severely rebuked by the President."²⁸ No reprimand followed, and Curtin continued to be a thorn in the War Department's side. When Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia moved toward Pennsylvania in the summer of 1863, Curtin managed to extract a written pledge from Stanton agreeing that emergency troops would be released whenever "I as governor of the State deem the emergency over."²⁹

Curtin flexed his gubernatorial muscles in these disputes because he believed he knew best how to persuade men to serve and to prevent turmoil on the home front. Men always preferred shorter terms of service, and Curtin wanted them to know he understood. When conscription loomed, the governor worried about the impact of a measure that con-

²⁶ J. Matthew Gallman, *Mastering Wartime: A Social History of Philadelphia during the Civil War* (New York, 1990), 15–16. Cameron followers took some revenge by joining Democratic criticism over reports that suppliers had provided substandard uniforms and shoes for Pennsylvania's soldiers. While the accusation reemerged in 1863, two inquiries cleared Curtin of personal wrongdoing. "The State Administration," *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph*, June 21, 1861.

²⁷ Blair, "We are Coming, Father Abraham," 193.

²⁸ Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Oct. 27, 1862, Edwin Stanton to Abraham Lincoln, Oct. 30, 1862, both Lincoln Papers.

²⁹ Andrew Curtin to Alexander Henry, June 20, 1863, box 1, folder 12, Alexander Henry Papers (Collection 278), Historical Society of Pennsylvania; see also Daniel R. Biddle and Murray Dubin, *Tasting Freedom: Octavius Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America* (Philadelphia, 2010), 287–93.

tradicted the American tradition of lauding citizen soldiers and fearing standing armies. When the first state militia draft was set for August 1862, with October elections on the horizon, Curtin found reasons to postpone the draft and then to fiddle figures so as not to enforce it in Democratic mining regions where he believed protests likely.³⁰ With the onset of the federal draft, Curtin regularly badgered provost marshal general James Fry with complaints about Pennsylvania's quotas, explaining that he did not wish to "add much to any feeling of hostility that may exist in the minds of the people against the Draft."³¹ These testy exchanges with Washington regularly featured in Pennsylvania's newspapers, and they infuriated Stanton and his colleagues. Curtin calculated that such squabbles would bolster his reputation with soldiers and civilians at home.

A letter the governor received in 1864 demonstrates the real value Curtin reaped from his obdurate approach toward the War Department. Engaged in a dispute with Washington over mustering out dates, an officer in the reserves wrote to the governor, explaining that "we appeal to you because you first conceived us, brought us into existence, our military father, and have at all times protected and defended us against assault."³² This was exactly the perception Curtin hoped to cultivate. The phrase "military father" is also a remarkable echo of Lincoln's moniker, "Father Abraham," used to great effect in the 1864 presidential election.

Lincoln may have consistently supported Curtin partly because he understood the political importance of his image as soldiers' protector. Years after Lincoln's death, provost marshal general James Fry contributed a chapter to a book of reminiscences on President Lincoln. He told a story of a Northern governor who was "earnest, able and untiring" but who "always wanted his own way" when it came to matters of raising and equipping troops. The governor's dispatches so irritated Secretary Stanton that he brought them to Lincoln's attention. The president replied with one of his famous stories:

³⁰ Bradley, *The Triumph of Militant Republicanism*, 154.

³¹ Andrew Curtin to Edwin Stanton, July 13, 1863, and Andrew Curtin to James B. Fry, Aug. 11, 1863, Executive Correspondence (series #26.8); Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth; Record Group 26, Records of the Department of State; Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg (as viewed on Pennsylvania State Archive microfilm #6269), hereafter Executive Correspondence, PSA.

³² Timothy J. Orr, "We Are No Grumblers: Negotiating State and Federal Military Service in the Pennsylvania Reserve Division," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 135 (2011): 472.

Never mind, never mind; those dispatches don't mean anything. Just go right ahead. The Governor is like a boy I saw once at a launching. When everything was ready they picked out a boy and sent him under the ship to knock away the trigger and let her go. At the critical moment everything depended on the boy. He had to do the job well by a direct vigorous blow, and then lie flat and keep still while the ship slid over him. The boy did everything right, but he yelled as if he was being murdered from the time he got under the keel until he got out. I thought the hide was all scraped off his back; but he wasn't hurt at all. The master of the yard told me that this boy was always chosen for that job, that he did his work well, that he never had been hurt, but that he always squealed in that way. That's just the way with Governor __. Make up your minds that he is not hurt, and that he is doing the work right, and pay no attention to his squealing. He only wants to make you understand how hard his task is, and that he is on hand performing it.³³

It may not have been to Curtin that the president referred, but it seems very likely. The message applied, and there is no doubting that a profound rift existed between Curtin and Stanton. Lincoln certainly grasped much better than his secretary of war that the governor's "squealing" served the needs of his constituency at home and did not impinge on his loyalty or ability. Soldiers had become the heartbeat of Curtin's administration; serving them, and being seen to serve them, was central to his Unionist ideology.³⁴

Curtin's determination to serve his state's troops helped gain the support of Democrats in the Union army. Timothy J. Orr has examined political allegiances among Pennsylvania units and found evidence that "the rise of the Copperheads in 1863 drove many Democratic soldiers into the Republican Party's ranks." One of the soldiers he cites, Captain Francis Donaldson, wrote in 1862 that he was "a Democrat, first, last and all the time," but also that "as long as the rebels are in arms I will sustain the government's efforts to put down the rebellion." The language of these

³³ James B. Fry, "James B. Fry," in *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of his Time*, ed. Allen Thorndike Rice (New York, 1886), 401–2.

³⁴ The governor in the story was named as Curtin by James Matlock Scovel in an article entitled "Recollections of Lincoln and Seward," in *Overland Monthly*, 2nd ser., 38 (1901): 270. The story also appears in McClure's *"Abe" Lincoln's Yarns and Stories: A Complete Collection of the Funny and Witty Anecdotes that Made Lincoln Famous as America's Greatest Storyteller* (Philadelphia, 1900). Stephen Engle has also recently identified Curtin as the governor in the story. See Engle, *Gathering to Save a Nation*, 479. For the Stanton-Curtin rift, see John W. Forney to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 14, 1864, Lincoln Papers.

men expresses a desire to vote Union more than Republican. Jonathan W. White has captured this phenomenon in a recent study, averring that such sentiments best conveyed the rejection of a party that “appeared unpatriotic and anti-soldier.” Many of these men saw their desertion of the Democracy as temporary. John White Geary, a Democrat who backed Curtin in 1863 and even succeeded him as a Republican governor in 1867, wrote as late as 1864 that he longed for the day when the party’s “gallant sons return to the fold, and democracy shall be like truth.” By downplaying the Republican element of his coalition and cloaking himself in Unionism, Curtin made it especially easy for soldiers of any political hue to support him.³⁵

Conservative soldiers could also applaud Curtin for his defense of the man most hated by radical Republicans: the general from Pennsylvania, George Brinton McClellan. In March of 1862, Curtin wrote to Lincoln that he and the masses had “entire confidence in the fidelity and ability of General McClellan.”³⁶ In September, at the Altoona conference of loyal war governors, he successfully defended “Little Mac” against radicals, such as Governor John Andrew of Massachusetts, who wanted his removal.³⁷ It was little surprise when, a few days after the conference, Curtin received a letter from the general, praising the governor and the people of Pennsylvania for the support they offered in the “defence of their frontier.” When Lincoln removed McClellan from command, the Curtin press immediately denied rumors that the governor had complained to the president about the decision.³⁸

It may well have disappointed Curtin when McClellan supported Democrat George Woodward in the 1863 election. Fortunately, the endorsement came only on the day of the vote, and it did not stop the

³⁵Timothy J. Orr, “A Viler Enemy in Our Rear,” in *The View from the Ground: Experiences of Civil War Soldiers*, ed. Aaron Sheehan-Dean (Lexington, KY, 2007), 181; J. Gregory Acken, ed., *Inside the Army of the Potomac: The Civil War Experience of Captain Francis Adams Donaldson* (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1998), 146; White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 4; John White Geary to Mary Church Geary, Oct. 24, 1864, John White Geary Letters, 1859–1865, vol. 2, Geary Family Papers (Collection 2062), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁶Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Mar. 3, 1862, Lincoln Papers.

³⁷For more detail on the Altoona conference, see Stephen D. Engle, “‘It is Time for the States to Speak to the Federal Government’: The Altoona Conference and Emancipation,” *Civil War History* 58 (2012): 416–50.

³⁸“Letter from General McClellan—The Valor of Pennsylvania Acknowledged,” *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 11, 1862, accessed online through Accessible Archives at <http://www.accessible-archives.com> (hereafter Accessible Archives); “Gov. Curtin and Gen. McClellan,” *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph*, Nov. 21, 1862.

Philadelphia Press from misleadingly reprinting the laudatory 1862 letter to Curtin from McClellan, under the headline “Gen. McClellan Endorses Governor Curtin.” As much as radicals despised him, McClellan remained popular with soldiers and embodied a conservative Unionism. Until he became the Democratic presidential nominee on a peace platform in 1864, he was exactly the sort of figure with whom Curtin wished to be associated.³⁹

Emancipation Politics

Once President Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation, Curtin could no longer entirely avoid questions of race. Even so, when Curtin delivered his 1863 inaugural—six days after Lincoln’s message—newspapers keenly noted that the governor made no mention of emancipation. The *New York Herald* stated that Curtin “refused to touch it,” while the *Philadelphia North American* added, “nor indeed is the policy of the national government in any respect spoke of.” Curtin most likely shared the views of his closest ally, Alexander McClure, who had spent the first years of the war regularly advising President Lincoln that any definitive move on emancipation would ensure electoral oblivion.⁴⁰ This opinion was borne of an appreciation of the extremes of opinion within his state. Many Democratic soldiers, and some Republican ones, resented emancipation and feared its consequences. Tom Crowl, of the Eighty-Seventh Pennsylvanian volunteers, expressed the not uncommon view that “This Nigrow freedom is what is playing hell . . . We never enlisted to fight for Nigrows.”⁴¹ On the other hand, many of Curtin’s constituents heralded the end of slavery and fought, physically and rhetorically, to achieve

³⁹ “Gen. McClellan Endorses Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 13, 1863. Democratic chairman Charles Biddle wrote to McClellan on September 2, 1863, asking for an endorsement. It is not clear why McClellan took nearly six weeks to grant it, but his previous good relations with Curtin may have been a factor. See Charles J. Biddle to George B. McClellan, Sept. 2, 1863, box 39, folder 3, Biddle Family Papers (Collection 1792), Historical Society of Pennsylvania. For McClellan’s ideological position and appeal, see Ethan S. Rafuse, *McClellan’s War: The Failure of Moderation in the Struggle for the Union* (Bloomington, IN, 2011).

⁴⁰ “Miscellaneous News,” *New York Herald*, Jan. 11, 1863, Early American Newspapers, and “Message of Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia North American*, Jan. 8, 1863, accessed online through 19th Century U.S. Newspapers at <http://www.gale.com/19th-century-us-newspapers/>; McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 1:532.

⁴¹ Quoted in Dennis W. Brandt, *From Home Guards to Heroes: The 87th Pennsylvania and its Civil War Community* (Columbia, MO, 2006), 163. For a detailed discussion of Union troops’ views on emancipation, see Gary W. Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, MA, 2011), 75–118.

it. Difficult as it was, when finally addressing the issue of slavery, Curtin sought a middle ground. The positions he staked, and the rhetoric he used, offer important markers for placing him on the ideological spectrum of his era.

The *Christian Recorder*—the Philadelphia-based organ of the AME Church—praised Curtin’s defense of emancipation at a Union League meeting in March 1863. The governor argued that slaveholders had forfeited their property rights and that, legally, “property” was now fair game to the Union army. Curtin assured his audience that no influx of black labor would ensue because “the free negro does not seek a Northern climate . . . he is constrained by a law of nature . . . the negro will not only remain in, but go to the South . . . as its climate is adapted to his physical conformation.” Curtin did not sound *anything* like an abolitionist. But the *Christian Recorder* could understandably celebrate his role in a meeting in which the overall message proclaimed the downfall of slavery.⁴²

The question of black enlistment also brought a definite, if distasteful, endorsement. Pennsylvania had one of the largest free black populations in the United States, and this community responded vigorously to calls for troops. A recruiting committee including Frederick Douglass and Octavius Catto helped spur more than eight thousand black men from Pennsylvania to serve in the Union army.⁴³ Curtin came to endorse this process, but in unpalatably pragmatic terms. Curtin admitted that much did “revolve around the massive woolly head of the nigger,” and he stated that “when the rebels were on our soil, I would have armed black and white, and yellow men; I would have equipped the clovenhoofed gentleman himself.” Curtin used the analogy of a willingness to arm the devil more than once, and it hardly represented a glowing endorsement of black service. He went on to report that the African Americans he had armed “went apart, by themselves; they worked in the trenches, and so conducted themselves that when they passed through the city gentleman cheered and ladies waved their handkerchiefs.” Curtin recognized here the segregated, limited, noncombat nature of their service, which he still praised.⁴⁴ Overall, the *Christian Recorder* mostly supported the governor. Curtin was criticized in 1864 for having taken no steps to remove any of the odious

⁴² “The Speech of Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Mar. 12, 1863; “Union Meeting in Philadelphia,” *Christian Recorder*, Mar. 21, 1863, Accessible Archives.

⁴³ Biddle and Durbin, *Tasting Freedom*, 290.

⁴⁴ “Speech of Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 7, 1863; “Andrew Curtin at Home,” *Central Press*, Oct. 23, 1863.

black laws of the state, but black regiments were reported leaving for the front with “three cheers” for the governor, and they returned in 1865 to a “welcome home” event at which Curtin was the honored guest.⁴⁵

The sources are not available to know Curtin’s inner feelings on race, but the limited nature of his public endorsements continued to differentiate him from the radicals. Indeed, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*—a Cameron organ—attacked Curtin in the summer of 1863 for surrounding himself with counselors who complained that the conflict had become “a negro war” and that “for every South Carolina rebel they would hang a Massachusetts abolitionist.” Democratic newspapers claimed that “Curtin is not ultra abolition enough for Cameron and his crew” and that “supporters of Curtin . . . indignantly repudiated the epithet ‘Abolitionists.’”⁴⁶ Supporting emancipation after the fact had not dislodged Curtin from his centrist footing.

The Home Front

Curtin understood that political success depended on recognizing the symbiotic relationship between the home front and battlefield. William Blair has suggested that Curtin’s disinclination to implement the draft came from his belief that it “ran contrary to civilian concerns” and that the governor “paid more attention to the needs of home.” In one sense, this is true. When Curtin pressed for emergency troops to be mustered out, he explained that “the furnaces, workshops, and mines in which they were employed are standing idle.” But Curtin did not believe that his duty to serve the civilian realm conflicted with his obligations to the army.⁴⁷ Curtin appointed state agents to cater to the needs of Pennsylvania soldiers. One of them, R. Biddle Roberts, explained his experience of this intertwined relationship: “I devoted my time always first to the soldier, but in many instances the desires of the civilian were so blended with the welfare of the soldier . . . the widow in quest of her late husband’s back pay . . . the anxious wife, parents, or other relative, in quest of some lost one

⁴⁵ “The Colored Men in this State Have Been Loyal to the Government,” *Christian Recorder*, July 30, 1864, “The Departure of the 6th U.S. Colored Regiment,” *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 17, 1863, and “Colored Soldiers! Welcome! Welcome!!” *Christian Recorder*, Oct. 28, 1865, Accessible Archives.

⁴⁶ “The Governor in his National Relations,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 28, 1863; “The Abolition Convention Today,” *Lebanon (PA) Advertiser*, Aug. 5, 1863; and “The Abolition Party,” *Lancaster (PA) Intelligencer*, Oct. 27, 1863.

⁴⁷ Blair, “We are Coming, Father Abraham,” 192, 206; Andrew Curtin to Darius Couch, July 23, 1863, Executive Correspondence, PSA.

who has given up his life in the field.”⁴⁸ Reports like these may have also helped Curtin grasp reasons and ways to cater for the largest nonvoting constituency in his state.

Curtin clearly made an effort to acknowledge the contributions of Pennsylvania’s women to the Union war effort. Judith Giesberg has uncovered some of the practical steps the governor took to help working-class women. Deprived of husbands, many had to manage farms and families on their own, often writing to Curtin asking for “money, furloughs, and discharges.” As men died in unprecedented numbers, requests poured in for help to retrieve and bury the bodies of fallen sons, brothers, and fathers. Curtin and his agents helped where they could, both on an individual basis and by setting up larger schemes. In 1862 the governor secured legislation to transfer wounded soldiers back to the state for treatment closer to loved ones. In 1864 he helped initiate an asylum for soldiers’ orphans, and, as Giesberg discovered, in 1865 Pennsylvania set up a program that reimbursed families for expenses incurred in the harrowing task of recovering the bodies strewn across Southern battlefields. These women recognized the limits of Curtin’s actions and were always “careful to characterize their work as patriotic.” They understood that only their direct relation to the war effort entitled them to assistance.⁴⁹

Letters between Annie Cabeen and her soldier sweetheart Joseph Lea suggest the political efficacy of Curtin’s actions. Annie feared a Democratic victory, and after the election Joseph told her that “I almost think I would have voted for Curtin if you had asked me, you seemed so deeply interested in his election.” Pennsylvania laws prevented Annie Cabeen, a woman, and Joseph Lea, a soldier in the field, from physically voting for Curtin in 1863. But there were doubtless other similar exchanges that yielded votes. Curtin nodded to this by regularly ending his 1863 stump speeches by thanking those who had “poured out Christian consolation,” adding “God Bless the women of Pennsylvania!” The *Philadelphia Press* reported that the audiences he spoke to were often populated by “bright-eyed women, who were anxious to hear an argument by which to convert some doubting husband,

⁴⁸ *Report of Col. R. Biddle Roberts, Pennsylvania State Agent at Washington, D.C.* (1863), accessed online through HathiTrust digital library.

⁴⁹ Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 34, 43, 150–51. It is unclear how many requests were granted, but many letters quoted neighbors receiving support. For details of the orphans’ asylum, see Reed, *Papers of the Governors*, 8:465.

brother, or lover.”⁵⁰ Like Curtin’s negotiations around the draft, these actions must be seen as both civilian and military, nonpartisan and political.

1863

Curtin faced reelection in a year when emancipation, conscription, and black military service all signified a distinct turn to a harder form of war. Radical Republicans began talking of a Reconstruction that would force the South into a permanent and substantive accommodation to black freedom. Democrats attacked measures they deemed unconstitutional and crippling to hopes that the rebellious states could return peacefully to the Union. Yet, if one listened to Curtin and his surrogates, one could be forgiven for thinking it was still 1861. Curtin’s Union Party clung to the patriotic dogmas that had united voters of all parties in the aftermath of the firing on Fort Sumter. Curtin focused relentlessly on the immediate task of winning the war, ignoring or criticizing controversial measures while classing them as solely military necessities. Hoping to appeal to Democrats appalled at the rise of a peace wing within their own party, he even courted the idea of installing a War Democrat as his successor.

Curtin’s health suffered during the war, and, in his third annual address, he made public his intention not to seek reelection while privately attempting to ensure that General William Franklin, a loyal Democrat, would replace him.⁵¹ General Franklin was described by his biographer as “conservative in politics, social values, and military strategy.”⁵² To hatch this plan, McClure secured from President Lincoln the promise for Curtin of a “first class” foreign posting. The governor gratefully accepted, but the Democrats proved in no mood to nominate a candidate who might prove unwilling to berate the administration. Franklin gained only seven votes at the Democratic convention, which instead chose George Woodward,

⁵⁰ Letters between Joseph Lea and Annie Cabeen, box 2, The Papers of the Buxton, Lea & Marshall Families ca. 1855–1965, Accession #11412, Special Collections Dept., University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA; “Speech of Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 7, 1863.

⁵¹ It is not clear what his condition was, but McClure and Wayne MacVeagh both agreed that “in the spring of 1863 there was every indication of a general and final breakdown of his physical system.” Quotation from McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:41; see also Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 159–61.

⁵² Mark A. Snell, *From First to Last: The Life of Major General William B. Franklin* (New York, 2002), xiii.

a Democrat of more dubious loyalty.⁵³ This prompted Curtin to risk his health and seek reelection. Curtin's succession plan is inconceivable within traditional interpretations of Union parties as indistinguishable from Republicans, but it chimes easily with his consistent attempts to broaden the base and change the nature of the Republican coalition.

From the start of his administration, Curtin had embraced attempts to fuse with wavering Democrats. Immediately Curtin appointed a number of Democrats, and, in the state elections of 1861, he led attempts to merge the People's Party with the most prowar Democrats under a Union Party label.⁵⁴ The People's Party endorsed a number of Democratic candidates in marginal seats in a move that drew attacks from both radical Republicans and strongly partisan Democrats who wished to keep clear water between the parties. The Republican *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph* assailed the fledgling Union Party movement as a "false appeal" by those who really seek "the destruction of the Republican Party," while the *Democrat and Sentinel* urged Democrats not to join the Union movement in an editorial entitled "When the Greeks bring us gifts we fear them." The attacks from Republicans belie the scholarly perception that Union movements served only to strengthen Republicanism. The *Huntingdon Globe* demonstrates how Curtin's centrism allowed him to retain the support of former Democrats only willing to back a Union candidate. The *Globe* endorsed Stephen Douglas and Curtin's opponent, Henry Foster, in 1860. By 1863, the paper backed Curtin and the Union Party but opposed the "double dyed Republican party." Such endorsements would not shield Curtin from Republican anger at his *volte-face* on reelection.⁵⁵

Simon Cameron fused personal vendetta and ideological opposition in leading Republican attempts to replace Curtin with radical Republican

⁵³ Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Curtin, Apr. 13, 1863; Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Apr. 14, 1863, both Lincoln Papers. Franklin's biographer mentions his candidacy for governor as a Democrat but not Curtin's support. Snell, *From First to Last*, 271–73. Report of the convention in "The Democratic State Convention," *Lebanon (PA) Advertiser*, June 24, 1863.

⁵⁴ Curtin appointed Reuben C. Hale as quartermaster general as well as selecting Democratic general George Cadwalader as major general of the Pennsylvania Volunteers. He appointed Craig Biddle to his personal staff and Charles Biddle as colonel of the Pennsylvania "Bucktails" reserve regiment. Information collated from *Jeffersonian*, June 20, 1861, 2, and Biddle Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁵ "Our New Allies—Look Out for Old Frauds," *Pennsylvania Daily Telegraph*, Sept. 27, 1861; "When the Greeks bring us gifts we fear them," *Democrat and Sentinel*, June 5, 1861; "Regularly Nominated Democratic Ticket," *Huntingdon (PA) Globe*, Oct. 2, 1860; *Huntingdon (PA) Globe*, June 25, 1862, 2; and "The Contest is Not Between Republicans and Democrats," *Huntingdon (PA) Globe*, Oct. 7, 1863.

John Covode. The *Pittsburgh Gazette*, a Cameron organ, launched a vitriolic campaign against Curtin, praising hostile “Republicans” and berating the “Union Party” were it to renominate the governor. The *Gazette* asked readers to consider whether Curtin was “not more strongly inclined to the Peace Democracy, than to ourselves.” The irate Cameron wrote privately to President Lincoln, averring that “there are many good Republicans and pious Christians who would see him [Curtin] in Hell.”⁵⁶ Curtin’s renomination showed his strength with conservative Republicans and other Union Party backers. Faced with the Democratic alternative, radical Republicans had no option but to grudgingly endorse his candidacy.

Pennsylvania’s Democrats lampooned the Lincoln administration but stayed predominantly loyal. For their candidate, they chose sitting Pennsylvania Supreme Court justice George Woodward. Woodward’s judicial status lent weight to criticisms of unconstitutional actions taken by the Lincoln administration. But as a sitting justice in 1862, Woodward had ruled it unconstitutional to allow soldiers to vote in the field. Preventing men from voting in an election where one is the candidate represented terrible politics, and the judgment drew derision from the Union press while enhancing Curtin’s “soldier’s friend” appeal.⁵⁷ The official Democratic platform lambasted arbitrary arrests and restrictions on freedom of speech but also denounced the intimation that the party would “ever consent to peace upon any terms involving a dismemberment of the Union.” The convention defended its right to consider any measures to restore the Union and reiterated how many Democrats had sacrificed their lives for a limited war to “defend and maintain the supremacy of the Constitution and to preserve the Union.” Woodward’s campaign chairman, Charles Biddle, attempted to personally prove the party’s patriotism by temporarily resigning his position to help defend the state from Lee’s invasion. As traditional custom dictated, Woodward largely stayed quiet, but his two sons fought for the Union, and, in the week before the vote, he made known his support for the war’s continued prosecution.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ “Political Effects of the Legislation of 1862,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 27, 1863; “Popularity of the Governor,” *Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 29, 1863; Simon Cameron to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 18, 1863, Lincoln Papers. Democrats eagerly picked up on the *Gazette*’s attacks, arranging for their publication as a campaign pamphlet. See Joseph P. Barr to Charles J. Biddle, Aug. 18, 1863, box 39, folder 2, Biddle Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵⁷ White, *Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Reelection of Abraham Lincoln*, 15–16.

⁵⁸ “Proceedings of the Democratic State Convention,” *Daily Patriot & Union*, June 18, 1863; George Woodward to Charles Biddle, July 6, 1863, box 39, folder 1, Biddle Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; “Woodward Shuffling,” *Evening Telegraph*, Oct. 5, 1863. For a more detailed

Curtin may have blunted the effectiveness of Democratic indictments by his own willingness to criticize the administration. On January 28, 1863, Albert Boileau, editor of the *Philadelphia Evening Journal*, was arrested and taken to Fort McHenry for an article that praised Jefferson Davis and questioned Lincoln's capacity to restore the Union. Boileau's case quickly became a partisan football. On February 12, 1863, Curtin responded with a message that railed against traitors but also stated that the "courts of justice are open," that only Congress had the right to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, and that anyone accused of treason deserved a fair trial. Republicans took offense at what they saw as an unseemly bid for conservative support. Democrats remained suspicious but welcomed the missive, with a Representative Glenn claiming in the Pennsylvania Assembly that "the words of Governor Curtin . . . must have sunk and scorched like molten lead in the hearts of those" who "defend the usurpations of the President." Curtin's shot across the administration bow was heard beyond his state, and the Democratic *New York World* paid the governor a qualified compliment by claiming that his message had earned him a "backseat among the defenders of the rights of free speech."⁵⁹

As the campaign approached, Curtin's relationship with the troops began to yield real dividends. The mass of the soldiery could not vote, but Secretary Stanton agreed to grant as many furloughs as possible to help "carry the election in Pennsylvania."⁶⁰ Even those who could not get home still found ways to voice their support. Timothy Orr has noted the many soldier resolutions in Pennsylvania newspapers that threatened Copperheads and offered Curtin the "highest encomiums" in the early months of 1863. These missives from the front continued throughout the fall, as soldiers praised the governor's loyalty and love for the troops. On August 28, 1863, the Third Division, First Army Corps, praised "the Hon. Governor, who has a heart overflowing with gratitude toward the widows and orphans whose husbands and fathers have died tru [*sic*] and patriotic soldiers." In the week before the election, a soldier in the Sixth Pennsylvania

discussion of Woodward, see Arnold Shankman, *The Pennsylvania Anti-War Movement, 1861-1865* (Rutherford, NJ, 1980), 129.

⁵⁹"Gov. Curtin on Military Arrests," *Altoona (PA) Tribune*, Feb. 24, 1863; "Brief Paragraphs," *Erie (PA) Observer*, Feb. 21, 1863; *Republican Compiler*, Feb. 23, 1863, 2; "Arbitrary Arrests," *New York Times*, Feb. 14, 1863; *The Legislative Record: Containing the Debates and Proceedings of the Pennsylvania Legislature for the Session of 1863*, 807, accessed online through HathiTrust Digital Library; *New York World* quoted in Arnold Shankman, "Freedom of the Press during the Civil War: The Case of Albert D. Boileau," *Pennsylvania History* 42 (1975): 313.

⁶⁰Edwin Stanton to William Meredith, Sept. 28, 1863, box 74, folder 7, Meredith Family Papers (Collection 1509), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Reserves publicly begged his sibling to vote for the “the right hand man of the United States—Governor Andrew G. Curtin.” Just in case civilians still struggled to grasp their message, the troops published replica votes. Nearly all mirrored those of the Fifth and Tenth Pennsylvania Reserves, which recorded lopsided Curtin victories of 310 to 12 and 383 to 9. From the confines of camp, the rank and file offered all the support they could short of actually casting a ballot.⁶¹

Reelection: “Our Country, Right or Wrong!”

In mid-September, the Union Party State Central Committee issued an address, written by Curtin’s campaign chairman, Wayne MacVeagh, to the people of Pennsylvania. The title—“Our Country, Right or Wrong!”—seemed to openly acknowledge discontent with Republican governance. Adopted by the Democratic Party during the war with Mexico, the phrase had long been attacked by abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips for its “trespass” on the “domain of morals.”⁶² Atop Curtin’s campaign, it offered an inspiring but also temporally limited message. A resounding call to patriotism, it asked people to recognize that “the destiny of free government throughout the world” lay at stake. The full address also celebrated the end of slavery, but it climaxed by acknowledging persistent divisions: “If . . . anything is left undone, which some think ought to have been done, or anything has been done which some think should have been left undone, we reserve these matters for more opportune discussion in the calmer days of peace.”⁶³ This represented a traditional invoking of military necessity. But by hinting that measures might be revisited once the war passed, it placed an additional layer of doubt on the steps taken. As the Union Party slogan, it invited waverers to embrace Curtin’s coalition.

Wayne MacVeagh, chairman of the committee, led across the state a band of speakers who used this centrist message to appeal to conservatives, especially Democrats. MacVeagh opened a meeting in Lancaster proclaiming that all loyal Democrats were “declaring their fealty to the

⁶¹ Orr, “A Viler Enemy in Our Rear,” 176; “Political,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 28, 1863, *America’s Historical Newspapers*; “Listen to the Voices of the Brave Tioga Soldier Boys,” *Tioga County Agitator*, Oct. 9, 1863.

⁶² W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2013), 229. It also served as the wartime motto for the *Boston Courier*, a conservative newspaper. See Thomas H. O’Connor, *Civil War Boston: Home Front and Battlefield* (Boston, 1997), 53.

⁶³ “Our Country, Right or Wrong!” *The Alleghenian*, Sept. 17, 1863.

Union.” Repurposing much opposition rhetoric, he stated that “if you desire peace, you will vote Curtin; if you would prevent another draft, you will vote Curtin”; otherwise, he warned, “all this effort to maintain the old Union, and to preserve the old Constitution, shall have been in vain.” The emphasis on the *old* Union and Constitution surely represented an attempt to reject Democratic claims that the meaning of the war had shifted from Union to emancipation. MacVeagh maintained that restoring the Union remained the purpose of the war. The next speaker, Greene Adams, drove the message home. An old Whig lawyer from Kentucky, Adams admitted that he still owned slaves but accepted that the institution was doomed. He urged Pennsylvanians to recognize the larger goal and join him in serving “the cause of Union” by reelecting Curtin.⁶⁴

If slaveholders did not sufficiently convey the inclusive message, Union Party podiums also regularly hosted Democratic converts. Few embodied Curtin’s message better than Colonel Thomas C. MacDowell, until 1862 the editor of the fiercely Democratic *Harrisburg Patriot and Union*. MacDowell told voters, “I have been a Democrat all my life . . . I am a Democrat still . . . I take back nothing that I have ever cherished in the way of principles; I sacrifice nothing that I have ever loved.” But MacDowell feared Democratic victories could produce Confederate recognition from Europe, leading to the permanent destruction of the Union that both parties cherished. For this reason, he urged Democrats to “stick to the government; stand by those who are administering it for the time being; and if there are any abuses, I will, after a while, in more peaceful times, join hands with you to reform all those abuses.”⁶⁵ With enthusiasm or reluctance, all were encouraged to recognize that, for now—“Right or Wrong”—the only option was to support Curtin and the Union.

Illness limited Curtin’s personal appearances, but when he did take the stump he eloquently invoked the Union cause and said nothing to alienate conservatives. He dutifully repeated the campaign slogan that “I accept all that is bad as well as all that is good in the Government, for I am for the Government, right or wrong.” But he focused mostly on the positive and substantive associations of Union. Opening with a paean to the troops, he reminded his audiences that “for the Government, your neighbors have

⁶⁴“The Canvass for Governor,” *Philadelphia Press*, Sept. 18, 1863.

⁶⁵Macdowell was briefly imprisoned in 1862 for material suspected of inciting civil unrest. John A. Marshall, *American Bastille: A History of the Illegal Arrests and Imprisonment of American Citizens during the Late Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1876), 501; “A Democrat on the Stump for His Country,” *Evening Telegraph*, Sept. 28, 1863, “Speech of Thomas C. MacDowell,” *Evening Telegraph*, Oct. 13, 1863.

bled and eat the dust.” Again and again, he proclaimed, “I thank my God that I have one virtue of which I can boast—loyalty to my country.” On election eve in Philadelphia, he drew on the historical ballast of the founders: “here, this night, on the sacred ground where the Government was formed . . . I praise my God that he directed and controlled me that I have been and am faithful to my country.” In a perilous present, harkening to a shared and sacred past made for a resonant rallying cry. Come election day, he had no doubt that “Pennsylvania will declare her fidelity with the ballot-box, as she has done with the cartridge-box.”⁶⁶

Andrew Curtin won reelection by 15,335 votes, less than 3 percent of the more than 500,000 cast. This halved his 1860 majority but reversed Democratic successes in 1862. Campaign manager Wayne MacVeagh put the victory down to “the mute eloquence of disfranchised soldiers whose appeals came from camp, hospital and field to fathers, brothers and friends at home.”⁶⁷ The absence of most of the military vote certainly helped to make it an impressive and far from certain result. The victories at Vicksburg and Gettysburg undeniably raised Curtin’s prospects, but the boost these offered may well have been enhanced by his close bond with the state’s soldiers.

Conclusion

State-level incarnations, including Pennsylvania’s Union Party, paved the way for the National Union Party that reelected President Lincoln. By 1864, the Republican label had faded steadily, to the extent that Michael Holt has found that 83 percent of congressional races that year registered as Union against Democrat, not Republican against Democrat. Holt has argued that when Lincoln embraced the Union moniker, it reflected his desire to reorient his party away from an appeal based solely on “hostility toward the South and the Democratic party” and to “replace the Republican party with a new bisectonal organization to be called the Union party.”⁶⁸ Holt makes a bold claim, but it certainly reflects the tenor of attempts to expand Republican politics in Pennsylvania. Curtin himself

⁶⁶ “Speech of Governor Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 7, 1863; “Speech of Governor A. G. Curtin,” *Philadelphia Press*, Oct. 12, 1863.

⁶⁷ Egle, *Andrew Gregg Curtin*, 163.

⁶⁸ Michael Fitzgibbon Holt, “A Moving Target: President Lincoln Confronts a Two-Party System Still in the Making” (conference paper, Annual Symposium of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, IL, Feb. 12, 2004), 2; Holt, “Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Union,” 330.

had been reported attending, in early 1863, a New York meeting arranged by Thurlow Weed to discuss the formation of a “new party” at a national level made up of “war democrats and conservative republicans.” Voices from elsewhere expressed similar desires. In September of 1863, the governor of Oregon, Addison Gibbs, implored Lincoln to form a National Union Party ticket. Explaining that the Pacific Coast hinged on an alliance of Republicans and Douglas men under a “Union” label, he warned that a “Republican” presidential ticket would bring disaster. In that case, Gibbs suggested, “we may learn when it is too late that there is something in a name.”⁶⁹

Even a cursory examination of the heated debates at the 1864 National Union Party convention reveals clear splits over the present and future direction of Lincoln’s coalition. Radical Republicans faced off against delegates from the border states of the lower North and Midwest over whether to admit representatives from the Southern states and whether to choose Andrew Johnson or Hannibal Hamlin as the vice presidential candidate. In both cases, the radical Republicans lost. The attempt to recast the party as a national movement was captured by Robert J. Breckenridge of Kentucky—a former Whig slaveholder—who opened the convention promising that “as a Union Party I will follow you to the ends of the earth, and to the gates of death. But as an abolition party—as a Republican party—as a Whig party—as a Democratic party—as an American party, I will not follow you one foot.” In a dramatic manifestation of the transformative nature of war, Breckenridge accepted the end of slavery. But a profound schism with radicals remained over what should happen next: Did emancipation necessitate moves toward establishing black social and political equality? What type of Reconstruction should Southern states undergo before they could rejoin the Union? On these issues, the National Union Party of 1864 stood deeply divided. Those who stressed the Union nature of the party, and the centrism that held it together, backed conservative solutions to these problems.⁷⁰

Curtin’s appearances in the 1864 campaign showed how easily his rhetoric fitted the presidential race. A typical account stated that he “entered into no discussion of political topics, but confined himself to exhortations to the people to perform their duty to their country, to the soldiers in the

⁶⁹“Personal,” *Philadelphia Press*, Feb. 16, 1863, “Gov. Curtin and a New Political Party,” *Philadelphia Press*, Feb. 17, 1863, “Abolition in Disguise,” *Democrat and Sentinel*, Feb. 25, 1863; Addison C. Gibbs to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 24, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

⁷⁰*Proceedings of the National Union Convention, Held in Baltimore, Md., June 7th and 8th, 1864* (New York, 1864), accessed online at HathiTrust Digital Library.

field, to themselves.” The frustration this produced suggests its effectiveness. Democrats complained that neither Curtin nor his press “say one word about State policy . . . they are mute as mice upon the subject of the Tariff, the question of emancipation and negro equality, the suppression of free speech and the press, arbitrary arrests, &c.” Avoiding these issues allowed those indifferent or opposed to Republicanism to stand with the Union. The National Union Party embraced this strategy, featuring emancipation prominently in only 28 of 213 pamphlets and broadsides. In doing so, Union parties cast doubt—politically advantageous, to be sure, but real—over the future permanence, or at least nature, of the Republican project.⁷¹

Politicians and voters during the Civil War genuinely struggled to come to terms with policies that had been unthinkable four years earlier. Union parties cast these unprecedented measures as military necessities because that represented the only basis on which a majority of people could conceive them as constitutionally justified and desirable. Curtin clearly shared these doubts. As well as ignoring emancipation and publicly criticizing arbitrary arrests, he wrote privately to Lincoln, describing the suspension of habeas corpus as a “heavy blow” and the draft, though necessary, as “very odious in the state.”⁷² As a politician, he also understood that how he explained and justified policy mattered almost as much as the policy itself. To speak with approbation of controversial measures would lose support from conservatives. By understanding Lincoln’s policies as measures to suppress the rebellion, these voters sustained the government under the Union Party banner.

Curtin reinforced his political messages with governing choices, showing the important ways that governors served as influential party heads and powerful executives. In repeated clashes with Washington, Lincoln sided with Curtin because he recognized that the growth of the federal government had not diminished the political relevance of the states. Election results in a federal system remained beyond the president’s control. Lincoln needed Pennsylvania’s support and had little option but to trust Curtin’s loyalty and accommodate the sometimes obstructive positions he took. On the home front, Curtin’s actions to cater to all who

⁷¹ “Meeting at Haddonfield—Speech of Governor Curtin,” *Daily Evening Bulletin*, Nov. 5, 1864; “The ‘Soldiers’ Friend,’” *Lancaster (PA) Intelligencer*, Aug. 25, 1863; for a discussion of the 1864 strategy and for the calculations, originally worked out by Adam I. P. Smith, see Philip Shaw Paludan, “War is the Health of the Party,” in *The Birth of the Grand Old Party*, 63–65.

⁷² Andrew Curtin to Abraham Lincoln, Sept. 18, 1863, and Sept. 4, 1863, Lincoln Papers.

supported the war effort helped prevent civil strife and complemented his inclusive Unionist message.

For the likes of Charles Sumner or Thaddeus Stevens, the war was an opportunity to reshape what America meant; it was not about restoration but revolution. For Curtin, it was about maintaining “the Union at all hazards.” As a former Whig who flirted with the Know-Nothings before becoming a Democrat in the late 1870s, it seems deeply unlikely that Curtin secretly served a radical cause. He may have entertained a dream of many Old Whig conservatives who, in the aftermath of their party’s collapse, hoped to move “toward a combination with conservative Democrats in a new Union party.”⁷³ Slavery’s imminent demise may have only increased the incentive to now craft a cross-party appeal wrapped in the banner of Union. A political crisis had precipitated the Civil War, a dramatic failure of moderates to find common ground. The centrist approach taken by Curtin, and adopted nationally in 1864, may have seemed to offer the best hope to win the war, heal old schisms, and reestablish peace and prosperity.

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⁷³ Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York, 1999), 774.