

THE LIBERAL REPUBLICAN REVOLT OF 1872 AND THE OIL REGIONS

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THE YEAR 1872 marks a distinct revolutionary period in the growth of public opinion in western Pennsylvania. In that year, thirty thousand men, the vigorous pioneers of the Oil Regions, dared to defy the corrupt forces of entrenched economic privilege and mechanized political control which had warped the post-Civil War framework of American life. The nation anxiously witnessed and enthusiastically applauded the dramatic twenty-nine days from February 26 to March 25, 1872, when aggressive leaders of the Oil Regions led a victorious revolt against John D. Rockefeller's monstrous South Improvement combine which attempted to stifle the refining interests of independent oildom.² Once the hated "Anaconda" was slain, the crusading public opinion of the western regions dug even deeper and contested the corrupt Republican groups in Washington and Harrisburg, which had so long debauched legislation and spawned monopolies. Because the attempt of the western counties to band together for independent political action against the iniquities of the Grant-Cameron control ended in a disgruntled failure, historians have chosen to ignore the details of that story in favor of accounts of the conspicuously successful Oil War of 1872. It is the contention of the present author that here in western Pennsylvania can be found the germination of principles and grievances that were to illustrate the genesis of the Liberal Republican revolt of 1872 and the crystallization of forces and opinion that were to spell the political demise of this threatened tempest against orthodox Republicanism.

Hardly anywhere else in the country was there a sadder picture of the transition state of post-war politics than that presented in Pennsylvania. For six years crafty Senator Simon Cameron had dominated a majority Republican party, wretchedly corrupt, devoid of policy or

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² Harold M. Helfman, "Twenty-nine Hectic Days: Public Opinion and the Oil War of 1872," in *Pennsylvania History*, 17:121-139 (April, 1950).

principle, the prey of rings and political rascals.³ His masterful organization, periodically confronted by disturbing murmurs of defiant discontent in the ranks or by rumors of a threatened schism within the state organization, had successfully defied assault on every side. The daily press of the western counties, as with one voice, protested month after month, year after year, against the monstrous abuse of power by a machine of men who occupied the legislative, executive and judicial chairs at Harrisburg, but come election time, the editors still recommended voting the straight Republican ticket. In 1872, however, that party had a record to clear and an atonement to make to the thirty thousand voters of the Oil Regions who had banded together in "The Oilmen's League"⁴ for their future defense against corporate privilege. After all, were not the legislature that granted the South Improvement Company its charter and Governor John White Geary who signed the iniquitous license to plunder the people members of this Republican clique? As long as corrupt politicians continued to bow to unyielding corporate despotism, the victory gained by the western regions in the Oil War of 1872 was a hollow mockery. Furthermore, no one of ordinary intelligence could plead ignorance of a crushing and growing state debt, an unexampled tax rate, and extortions by grafting public officials.

Startling evidences of foul play in the Fourth Senatorial District contest, held in the fall of 1871 at Philadelphia between the Cameron-supported Henry W. Gray and the anti-Administration Colonel Alexander K. McClure, fanned the fires of opposition. Later testimony disclosed how the custom house, the police force, the navy yard, the arsenal and revenue offices—all strongholds of Cameron control—had given sanctuary to repeaters, perjured election officials, ballot-box stuffers, and forgers of spurious returns, expressly hired to defeat the McClure nomination. One by one, by name and position, the malefactors were pointed out in sworn statements, but the authorities made no effort either to impeach or to convict the culprits.⁵ Appeals to higher au-

3 *Nation*, 14:250 (April 18, 1872); Alexander K. McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:210-212 (Philadelphia, 1905). See also "Cameron Rule in Pennsylvania," a speech delivered in Fulton Hall, Lancaster, September 18, 1872, in *Speeches of A. K. McClure*, No. 9 (Philadelphia . . . 1870-1872), for a scathing denunciation of Cameron domination by one who helped direct the Liberal Republican revolt in Pennsylvania.

4 *Oil City Derrick*, March 12, 1872.

5 *Nation*, 14:82, 97-98, 210 (February 8, 15, April 4, 1872); "Letter to Philadelphia Evening Bulletin," dated April 20, 1872, in *Speeches of A. K. McClure*, No. 2, pp. 194-195; McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:302 ff.

thorities failed because the Cameron group operated under the protecting wing of President Ulysses S. Grant, whose inept conduct, want of earnest purpose, unfit appointments, and simple affection with corrupt materialism while chief executive had alienated by 1872 both partisan and reformer alike.⁶

The *Oil City Derrick*, whose fiery editor, Coleman E. Bishop, had led the fight against the Rockefeller monopoly, gathered his forces anew, this time aiming against political privilege. Sniffing the coming storm, Bishop warned the Republican convention scheduled to meet on April 10 in Harrisburg that if the party hoped to duplicate its 14,490 plurality of 1868 and wished to hold the support of the Oil Regions, it had best "make to itself an anti-monopoly record, nominate pure men, [and] call on its people to send better and truer men to the Legislature."⁷ This was wise foresight against the troublous time to come. The two-day meeting of the state Republican convention, however, was an insolent defiance of parliamentary precedent and public opinion, nicknamed by one observer as the "Ring and Rowdy Convention" for "its shameless disregard of any pretense even of decent usage."⁸ Prior to effecting a permanent organization, the group chairman, handpicked beforehand by Robert W. Mackey, general director of the Cameron forces in the state capital, submitted a carefully selected slate of delegates to the national convention which, bypassing the protests of a disorganized minority, the assemblage quickly passed.⁹ The success of this sudden strategem meant that the men chosen to reflect the wishes of the commonwealth's Republican supporters at the national convention would be devoid of heretical impulses, ready to repay their obligations to the Grant-Cameron regime for maintaining them in place and power. Republican regulars, firmly riveted behind the gubernatorial candidacy of General John Frederick Hartranft of Montgomery County, easily smothered on the first ballot the dissident elements of the western counties, prepared to support State Senator Winthrop W. Ketchum.¹⁰ The convention steamroller selected General Harrison Allen of Warren County as its candidate for auditor-general and Ulysses Mercur

6 George S. Merriam, *Life and Times of Samuel Bowles*, 2:175-176 (New York, 1885). See Don C. Seitz, *The Dreadful Decade, 1869-1879* (Indianapolis, 1926), for a lively discussion of Grant's administrations.

7 *Oil City Derrick*, April 5, 1872.

8 *New York Tribune*, April 12, 1872.

9 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 18, 1872.

10 *Oil City Derrick*, April 10, 1872.

of Bradford County for the supreme bench. To the disgust of the minority delegates, the group drew up resolutions of commendation for the Grant regime and specifically instructed the Pennsylvania delegation to vote for General Grant's renomination at the forthcoming Republican national convention at Philadelphia. The *Cincinnati Enquirer* on April 11 headlined the Harrisburg action under the caption, "Pennsylvania Howls for Grant." E. A. Penniman, editor of the *Wayne Citizen*, tersely summed up the anguished bitterness of the opposition: "The action of the convention means that henceforth the Republican party in Pennsylvania is to be used mainly to advance the purposes of the treasury and railroad rings. It was the most disgraceful political job—the most deliberate sale of a party ever witnessed in Pennsylvania. It was carried out in defiance of every protest, remonstrance and warning."¹¹

The Harrisburg debacle provoked a confused torrent of newspaper response from the Oil Regions. Some of the oldest and most influential Republican journals of the western area repudiated the ticket outright, while others felt duty bound to abide by the fiat of the convention, though guardedly conceding that the slate was weak and unpopular. Selection of General John F. Hartranft as the Republican standard bearer in the October elections prompted a heated debate between an indignant reform opposition which concentrated on suspected frauds incurred during his previous term as auditor-general, and the party regulars who played up Hartranft's distinguished combat service during the Civil War. The daily press of Pittsburgh, for example, split right down the middle. The *Chronicle*, *Leader*, and *Gazette* blasted the Republican gubernatorial nominee, while the *Dispatch*, *Times*, and *Mail* countered by cordially commending the convention's action, the latter publication pledging Allegheny County for an eight thousand majority. Although the *McKeesport Times* called Hartranft "the strongest name in the State,"¹² the *Venango Spectator* referred to his candidacy as that of "Hangman" Hartranft, thereby blaming the general for his part in the almost-forgotten Surratt hanging, when an innocent woman had fallen victim to the radical malice of the Civil

11 Quoted in *Venango Spectator* (Franklin), May 8, 1872.

12 Quoted in *Beaver Radical*, April 19, 1872.

War.¹³ The *Erie Dispatch* whitewashed Hartranft's record as auditor-general, epitomizing his service as "a very model of official integrity, efficiency and faithfulness."¹⁴ On the other hand, the *Oil City Derrick* echoed the charge of the *Venango Spectator* that Hartranft was a "tool" and mercilessly accused him of having been implicated in the notorious Evans fraud and of having "borrowed" \$7,500 from that infamous collector of war claims, a charge more than justified by the known facts of the case.¹⁵ The *Titusville Herald*, powerful in formulating public opinion along the Oil Creek, unequivocally supported a straight-out Republican ticket, praising Hartranft's "simplicity of character" and "straightforward honesty of purpose."¹⁶ Indeed, one could scarcely expect an anti-Administration stand from the *Herald*, whose editor, H. C. Bloss, had a special niche in his office in which he kept a treasured bust of William Henry Seward as a political guidepost and ideological shrine.

Faced by what one out-of-town journal called "The Folly in Pennsylvania,"¹⁷ discordant Republican reformers in the Oil Regions saw three courses of action open to them: to remain in the regular Cameron organization, or to ally themselves with the Democrats, or to form a new opposition party. The first plan was out of the question since it meant kowtowing to a ring of unprincipled party managers who supported the renomination of the gullible Grant and sanctioned a continuation of the same fundamental causes of disruption in the commonwealth. Equally repugnant was the thought of joining hands with the Democrats, the group who had fought the entire program of congressional reconstruction and who represented in the popular mind the forces of disunion and antagonism to the rights of the emancipated Negro. Though the *Oil City Derrick* pledged the support of the Oil

13 *Venango Spectator*, April 10, 1872. A *Spectator* reporter, standing on one of Franklin's most frequented corners, hailed a dozen passers-by, "every one of whom said that he [Hartranft] was a scoundrel and belonged to a corrupt Ring, and that they would not vote for him under any circumstances."

14 Quoted in *Beaver Radical*, April 19, 1872.

15 *Oil City Derrick*, April 15, 1872; address, "Reform vs. Corruption," delivered on September 28, 1872, in *Speeches of A. K. McClure*, No. 11, pp. 5-6; McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:341.

16 *Titusville Herald*, April 12, 1872. The *Herald* "waved the bloody shirt" in the most approved fashion by editorially declaring: "Hartranft, like Grant, will represent to the people the great and holy cause of Union and Liberty, of successful war and a more triumphant Peace; and Pennsylvania will be untrue to the memories of Gettysburg if she does not crown both sides with victory."

17 *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 17, 1872.

Regions to the Democrats "if they nominate an honest, able ticket, unidentified with rings and monopolies,"¹⁸ that claim was fantastic. These western dissenters were not petulant opportunists but staunch Republicans, fully cognizant of the fact that were Pennsylvania in October to cast her twenty-eight electoral votes for the Democratic ticket, it would have almost as paralyzing an effect upon the activity of the Republicans as did the Democratic victory won in that pivotal state in 1856. It would be a blow delivered with such moral force that the Republicans could hardly recover from it in time to counteract the effect before the general November contests. The only alternative remaining was the formation of a new party, directed by Republicans in order to conform to the traditions of the past, but one which would repudiate the administration ticket, take the steps needed to purge the management and policies of the old-line party, and strive toward independent action in the future. Secession from the regular Republican ranks, however, was a step fraught with danger since it meant alienating the local newspapers, which, though outwardly antagonistic toward the Cameron control, would, when the political chips were down in October, be sure to cast their lot with the regular die-hards and urge their readers to vote the straight Republican ticket.

Spurning all appeals to party loyalty, unreconciled groups in the western counties joined their eastern brethren in bolting the Republican slate and in casting about for a common expression of opposition. In the national Liberal Republican movement which was then growing out of the Middle West, these political outlaws found their medium of protest against bossism and corruption. Aggressive opposition to President Grant of an able bloc of Republican Senators—Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, Reuben E. Fenton of New York, and Carl Schurz of Missouri—had inspired reforming Republicans to meet at Jefferson City, Missouri, on January 24, 1872, whereupon they had invited all Republicans who opposed the Grant regime and favored governmental reform to gather at a national conclave in Cincinnati on the first Wednesday of May.¹⁹ Dubbed the Liberal Republicans, the movement became the rallying ground of the dissatisfied Keystone bolters. Thoughts of drafting Colonel Alexander K. McClure as an independent candidate for governor of Pennsylv-

18 Oil City Derrick, April 15, 1872.

19 Earle D. Ross, *The Liberal Republican Movement* (New York, 1919), is still the most satisfactory account of the origins of the revolt against "Grantism."

nia,²⁰ a move which the *Cincinnati Enquirer* optimistically predicted would sweep the state by a 50,000 majority,²¹ were put in temporary abeyance, pending the outcome of the Cincinnati meeting, three weeks hence.

Prominent Republicans of the Oil Regions answered Colonel McClure's call to rally around the Liberal Republican label. McClure's correspondence with influential old-line party leaders in the western districts convinced him that although the partisan press viewed unfavorably a third-party opposition movement, the general anti-Grant and anti-Cameron feeling there was so real among individual voters that it promised more than an outside chance of success at the polls.²² Liberal Republican converts of Butler, Venango, Clarion, and Mercer counties met at Franklin to pledge their fealty to the Cincinnati cause and selected the following delegates: S. P. McCalmont, William Brough, W. C. Rheem, E. R. King, J. B. Barbour, W. R. Crawford, J. B. Osborn, and David Sterrett.²³ Enthusiastic bolters from Warren and Forest counties gathered in Warren and voted to send M. Waters and O. H. Hunter to the Cincinnati convention; while Erie and Crawford counties named M. B. Lowrey to be the spokesman for their fifty-eight delegates. Although C. F. Bauer of the Pittsburgh *Volksblatt* urged his German readers to come out openly in support of a new party slate,²⁴ politicians of Allegheny County and environs generally were reluctant to declare intentions sympathetic to the Liberal movement. To do so meant incurring the journalistic wrath which was currently descending upon the heads of the Republican independents.

With the exception of the *Crawford Journal*, which counted itself among the Liberals, and the *Titusville Courier*, whose masthead proudly proclaimed that this was "The Only Democratic Daily in Northwestern Pennsylvania," the western press identified personal loyalty to President Grant and the regular Republican party as synonymous with true American patriotism. The *Titusville Herald* set the

20 *New York Tribune*, April 12, 1872; *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 17, 1872.

21 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 15, 1872.

22 McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:333-334. The historian regrets the tragic fact that at the close of the campaign of 1872 Colonel McClure destroyed these valuable letters rather than embarrass those Republicans who had expressed their sympathy for the Liberal cause.

23 *Oil City Derrick*, April 23, 1872.

24 *Venango Spectator*, April 26, 1872; *New York World*, April 30; *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 30.

tone for the Oil Regions, declaring the Cincinnati gathering to be merely a "mass meeting of soreheaded politicians," the device of "men, worshipping their own greatness, and jealous and impatient of their superior in office." The "true purpose" of the Republican bolters, the *Herald* had previously observed, "was to place a man in their own interest in the Presidential chair, and through him to gain a distribution of the offices in the gift of the administration so that they would be benefitted thereby."²⁵ The *Beaver Radical* reiterated the revenge theme and pronounced the Liberal movement false in pretense and abortive in effect. Notwithstanding the fact that, with one exception, none of the eight Liberal delegates selected at the Franklin meeting had ever held office or even been candidates, though they had heretofore been active in politics and labored diligently for the Republican party, the *Oil City Derrick* played up the group as disgruntled politicians and selfish self-seekers. Observers for the *Pittsburgh Gazette* commented on "sheep out of the flock" gathering in an action that had "been bunglingly carried on from the outset, without order or any attempt at system." The choicest witticism of the Oil Regions was to ask anyone suspected of harboring an intention to attend the Cincinnati conclave: "Are you going to visit the Morgue?"²⁶ Denied the legitimate avenues of public notice in the three weeks before the Liberal national convention, the western bolters thus failed to reach or to affect the general public of their area, either in interests or in sympathies. The regional newspapers gave their subscribers full information on the latest oil quotations and sales, editorialized on a threatened renewal of the Rockefeller monopoly, but abstained from printing letters to the editor or news comments favorable to the Liberal Republican cause. The Liberal action had been too sudden, too spontaneous. Political attachments could not grow up in one night, nor perish in one day. With no way for the Liberal Republican utterances to coalesce in the Oil Regions other than by word-of-mouth, the movement here was never a true growth firmly rooted in the people, but rather an artificial manufacture supported by isolated groups of zealous independents.

Seventy-five Pennsylvanians, described by one veteran observer as "in intelligence, and social and political position . . . the most solid

25 *Titusville Herald*, April 18, May 8, 1872.

26 *Beaver Radical*, April 19, 1872; *Venango Spectator*, April 25; *Oil City Derrick*, April 10, 15; *Pittsburgh Gazette*, April 29.

small delegation" he had seen,²⁷ descended on Cincinnati, the "Queen City of the Ohio," for the start of the Liberal Republican convention. On Tuesday, April 30, the day before Judge Stanley Matthews of Ohio, the temporary chairman, was scheduled to deliver his introductory address, Pennsylvania's delegation held a long and stormy caucus at the College Hall in order to determine its presidential choice. The decision was a serious one. If only the Cincinnati conclave were to confer its presidential blessings on a prominent figure of high public, moral, and social stature, here would be the key talking point around which to rally the undecided electorate and the vacillating press back home. Candidates were not lacking. Probably the most available was Charles Francis Adams of Massachusetts, "a man versed in affairs,"²⁸ but repugnant to most Pennsylvanians for his avowed free-trade leanings, his slighting allusions to the Liberal convention, and the outspoken support extended him by August Belmont and the *New York World*. Mentioned as a possibility was the conscientious Senator Lyman Trumbull of Illinois, recognized by all as the possessor of one of the best legal minds in Congress, but a drab, lackluster campaigner.²⁹ Reaching desperately for the coveted nomination was the politically wise David Davis of Illinois, ambitious associate justice of the United States Supreme Court, who had already been nominated by an independent Labor Party, and whose supporters were lavishly entertaining interested state delegations and busily cooking up sundry deals with the rival organizations.³⁰ Always in the background was the eccentric editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greeley, whose oft-caricatured figure and shrill-voiced support of the latest "isms" had colored the national scene for the past thirty years.³¹

After two prolonged afternoon sessions, the Pennsylvania delegation voted to throw its unanimous weight behind a distinguished "fa-

27 *Cincinnati Commercial*, May 1, 1872. See also *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 2, 1872, for a formal roster of Pennsylvania's delegates-at-large, alternates, and district representatives. Samuel Bowles, writing in the *Springfield Weekly Republican*, May 10, 1872, observed that the New York and Pennsylvania delegations had more political experience than the rest of the Cincinnati crowd put together.

28 *Nation*, 14:269 (April 25, 1872). The *New York World*, April 24, 1872, flatteringly declared: "If our next President is to be selected on the grounds of fitness, no man in the country is so well entitled to the office as Mr. Adams."

29 Horace White, *Life of Lyman Trumbull* (Boston, 1913).

30 Claude M. Fuess, *Carl Schurz, Reformer*, 189 (New York, 1932).

31 William H. Rideing, *Many Celebrities and a Few Others: A Bundle of Reminiscences*, 48 (Garden City, N. Y., 1912).

vorite son," Andrew Gregg Curtin, honored war governor of the commonwealth, beloved as the "soldiers' friend," and currently serving as United States minister to Russia.³² It was apparent to every politically literate Liberal attending the convention that the Curtin candidacy was merely a complimentary gesture, since the Pennsylvania choice had no real chance of dislodging either Adams, Davis, Trumbull, or Greeley from the favorite's slot. But fifty-six votes dangling over the heads of the rival state delegations were enticing bait designed to give the Keystone bolters a potent behind-the-scenes bargaining power. This would enable the commonwealth to climb aboard the bandwagon of the convention's eventual presidential choice, and would assure that a protectionist plank, so avidly sought by the state's oil and industrial interests, would be written into the party platform.

On the eve of the convention's opening, all sorts of absorbing rumors attached themselves to the Pennsylvania group. Some political adepts predicted that sheer necessity would force the Liberal Republicans to include a Pennsylvania man on their ticket. After all, Pennsylvania was one of the four states holding elections in October, a few weeks before the presidential contest came off, and if the Liberals could carry that doubtful state, then others might stampede to the third-party banner in November.³³ Initial canvasses foresaw the possibility of a Greeley-Curtin slate, although the *New York Tribune* editor privately predicted a Davis-Curtin combination, a choice which the *Cincinnati Commercial* vehemently had branded an "absurdity." M. B. Lowrey, speaking for the Erie delegation, opined that even Charles Francis Adams could carry Pennsylvania if he were teamed with Governor Curtin. An editorial writer for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* exposed a plot whereby New York would throw over Horace Greeley and juggle through the convention a ticket of Governor John McAuley Palmer of Illinois and Curtin.³⁴ The fact was easily apparent to the

32 *Cincinnati Commercial*, May 1, 1872. See Alexander K. McClure, *Life and Services of Andrew G. Curtin* (Harrisburg, 1895), for a eulogized account of Curtin's career. Governor John W. Geary was the only other possibility for the "favorite son" nomination. Since his break with the Cameron machine, Governor Geary had become an outspoken critic of the Grant administration—*New York Herald*, April 12, 1871. Geary's candidacy never achieved prominence among the Pennsylvania delegation, and in the end he gave Grant "Lukewarm support."—McClure, *Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:274-277.

33 *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 25, 1872. The other "October" states were Ohio, Indiana, and Nebraska.

34 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 29, 1872; *New York World*, April 30; *Cincinnati Commercial*, April 18, 30; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, May 1.

delegates who thronged Cincinnati's hotel lobbies that whichever candidate controlled Pennsylvania's fifty-six votes might construct for himself the ladder by which he could eventually scale the White House.

The Cincinnati gathering was formally called to order on Wednesday, May 1, in the spacious Exposition Hall. Loud and excited was the confirmatory response of the Pennsylvania group to Judge Stanley Matthews' introductory declaration that "a large and influential portion of the American people are determined to be no longer dogs to wear the collar of a party."³⁵ Grimly they listened to the reading of the first five planks in the party platform, patriotically protesting against army rule, bloody shirt waving, and governmental corruption.³⁶ In stunned disbelief they heard the sixth Liberal pledge relegate the tariff question to the people in the individual congressional districts:

"Recognizing that there are in our midst honest, but irreconcilable, differences of opinion with regard to the respective systems of protection and free trade, we remit the discussion of the subject to the people in their Congressional districts and to the discussion of Congress thereon, wholly free of Executive interference or dictation."³⁷

Obviously the exigencies of political compromise had dictated the writing of the party's tariff plank. But to the hard-headed western Pennsylvanians, deferment and compromise were out of the question; the protective tariff was a vital issue with which the prosperity of their regions seemed to be inextricably connected. If Pittsburgh and Erie were to thrive as manufacturing centers, or if Oil City and Titusville were to retain their favored positions as mistresses of the nation's oil wealth, protection seemed the only answer. To the Oil Regions the regular Republican party stood squarely for tariff protection. If the Liberals passed a straddling tariff proviso, here would be conclusive proof to the scoffers at home who had insisted that the bolting delegates assembled at Cincinnati represented such diverse types of political thought and party purpose that, in the end, the gathering would probably break out in a free-for-all.³⁸ Before the Keystone delegates could organize their forces and make their objections heard on the floor of the assembly, the "convention of idealists and professors and sore-

³⁵ *New York Tribune*, May 2, 1872.

³⁶ Francis Curtis, *Republican Party, 1854-1904*, 2:6-9 (New York and London, 1904).

³⁷ *New York World*, May 4, 1872.

³⁸ *Titusville Herald*, May 3, 1872.

heads," as Roscoe Conkling had named it,³⁹ enthusiastically endorsed the platform in its entirety.

Frustrated and outgeneralled in the making of their party program, the western Pennsylvanians staked their all on salvaging some thing out of the presidential nomination. Declarations and principles are usually unimportant to the average voter since they at best express what parties pretend to be. If, however, the Liberal Republicans nominated a strong, forceful ticket to oppose Grant for the presidency, then the people would surely know what the new movement meant. Andrew G. Curtin received the solid backing of fifty-six Pennsylvania votes on the first ballot, but trailed badly behind the favored foursome, Adams, Greeley, Trumbull, and Davis, and none of them commanded a clear-cut majority. The convention floor buzzed with excitement when Colonel Alexander K. McClure, chairman of the Pennsylvania delegation, asked to withdraw the name of Andrew G. Curtin and requested permission from the chair to caucus his group prior to the second ballot. After a hurried conference, the Keystone Liberals dispersed their votes on the second count, twenty-six going to Adams, eighteen to Greeley, and eleven to Davis. The third time around Pennsylvania cast thirty-one votes for Adams and thirty-two on the fourth and fifth ballots, but still no candidate received a definitive majority. The decisive break came on the sixth ballot when Governor B. Gratz Brown of Missouri, playing for the second place on the ticket, withdrew his candidacy in favor of Horace Greeley, "the man most likely to win," as he phrased it. When the Greeley boom assumed definitive proportions, Pennsylvania reluctantly changed its vote to fifty for Greeley and six for Davis, thereby deciding the contest for the New Yorker.⁴⁰ The vice-presidential voting was purely an anti-climax, with Curtin's name removed from the running and the arch free-trader, B. Gratz Brown, receiving his party's bid on the very first ballot.⁴¹

The convention's selection of the erratic Greeley and the free-trading Brown as running mates, coupled with its neutral tariff stand, was the *coup de grace* to the reformers from the Oil Regions, the complete miscarriage of their high aims and cherished purposes. They had staked their all on offering their county organizations a candidate of

39 Matthew Josephson, *The Politicos, 1865-1896*, p. 163 (New York, 1938).

40 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 4, 1872.

41 That Governor Curtin's name would not be presented for Vice President was correctly predicted by the *New York World*, April 30, 1872.

sagacity and political strength, one who could offer the troubled country a peaceful, honest, and dignified government with a conciliation of the sections, but instead, to their undisguised dismay, they were saddled with an irascible old abolitionist as their party leader. Republicans, as a party, would refuse to support Greeley because of his previous desertions of Republican principles at various critical junctures. The Democrats would see in the editor of the *New York Tribune* an old line Whig, an Abolitionist, and a Radical Republican who opposed every principle and instinct traditionally entertained by their party.⁴²

Western Pennsylvania responded to the Greeley nomination with unrestrained mirth. The *Oil City Derrick's* editorial was typical, terming Greeley "weak, susceptible, vain and vacillating, neither statesman or politician,"⁴³ a reiteration of the choice comment of Thurlow Weed, who thought that "no considerable body of men outside a lunatic asylum would nominate such a man."⁴⁴ How could anyone think seriously about the moon-faced, bewhiskered Greeley, whose shambling gait, white slouch hat, and pockets stuffed with newspapers had long made him the merciless target of Thomas Nast's lampooning cartoons? Was a man who had supported in former years such fads as Fourierism and vegetarianism, who was violent in temper, impulsive in judgment, and profane in speech, to be trusted with the nation's highest administrative office? Could anyone refute the statement of the *Titusville Herald* that "no public man of his day has committed such egregious mistakes in political action, has been so amazingly inconsistent, and has indulged generally in such wild eccentricity of views and conduct in National affairs"?⁴⁵ How could the work of the convention be sold to an oil driller or a steel worker, untutored in the ways of politics, when such original Liberal Republicans as Stanley Mathews, Judge George Hoadley of Ohio, and Edwin L. Godkin of the *Nation* were abandoning Greeley's candidacy as one imperfectly representing all in which they believed?⁴⁶ The Liberal Republican movement, whose morning had

42 Dispassionately viewing the voting some thirty years later, Colonel McClure stated that "had Davis been nominated, he would have been elected by a very large majority, with the probability that the new party would have maintained its power for many years."—*Old Time Notes of Pennsylvania*, 2:337.

43 *Oil City Derrick*, May 7, 1872.

44 Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish: The Inner History of the Grant Administration*, 597 (New York, 1936).

45 *Titusville Herald*, May 4, 1872.

46 James F. Rhodes, *History of the United States*, 6:423-424 (New York, 1906).

opened with such enthusiastic promise in the western Oil Regions, had passed into the penumbra of defeat.

Colonel McClure's state-wide appeal to form local executive committees, "immediate and systematic," in order to press forward the Liberal Republican cause went unanswered by the demoralized revolters of the western counties.⁴⁷ The Republican *Oil City Derrick* and the independent *Oil City Register*, both cognizant of the fact that no candidate for governor had ever been nominated from northwestern Pennsylvania, made a last-ditch attempt to buck the Grant-Cameron machine. They assured the support of "The Oilmen's League" to the Democrats, if only that party would nominate General A. B. McCalmont of the regions for governor.⁴⁸ But when, on June 1, the Reading convention selected former Senator Charles R. Buckalew of Columbia County to oppose General Hartranft, the last hope of the Republican dissenters in western Pennsylvania disappeared. What had started as a movement of lofty idealism and altruistic purpose had ended in a roaring farce and bitter tragedy. The triumph of the Republican regulars in the forthcoming October election was once again assured.

Devoid of candidate and platform, the Liberal Republican movement in the Oil Regions was never attractive enough to impress the old-line Republican party with the necessity of complete and immediate reform within itself. The western Liberals were political amateurs, merely an ill-organized, grumbling opposition which failed to excite the public mind. Throughout their revolt they seemingly were oppressed with a vague anxiety, not wholly convinced that their movement was an entirely creditable proceeding. To us today, with our historical perspective, the formation of the new party seems to have been a mistake. It ended all hope of liberalizing the machinery, action, policy, attachments, or prejudices of the orthodox Republican party for a long time to come; and when most of the Liberals returned to the Cameron fold, they did so with heads bowed and their tails between their legs. They were to have remarkably little influence on party politics for the next quarter of a century.

⁴⁷ *Cincinnati Commercial*, May 7, 1872.

⁴⁸ Quoted in *Venango Spectator*, May 8, 10, 1872.