
The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has done the academic community and the general reading public a service by reissuing Robert Brunhouse's classic study of politics in Pennsylvania from 1776-1790. The book is based upon exhaustive research among the available materials left by the articulate observers of the times (contemporary comment). It contains a vast quantity of detail and is an essential guide to the intricacies of such highly complex issues as the Constitution of 1776, the Test Laws, the University of Pennsylvania, the Bank of North America, currency, price fixing, funding, the militia, the Continental line, and the Virginia-Pennsylvania boundary dispute west of the mountains. It also contains numerous anecdotal accounts of such dramatic events as the Anti-Federalist riots in Carlisle, the attacks on "Fort Wilson," the riot at Alexander Boyd's, the Wyoming controversy, and the Michael Hoofnagle-Archibald Lochry dispute over the Westmoreland County records.

The book concentrates on a narrative description of politics — the competition for and the use of the legitimate power of the state. The details are given structure and meaning by a clear-cut Radical-Conservative conceptual framework—the rise of the Radicals (1776-1779), the vicissitudes of the Radical-Conservative struggle (1780-1786), and the ultimate triumph of the Conservatives (1786-1790), "The Counter-Revolution." The Radicals were the farmers, the debtors, the frontier democrats, and the radicals of the Scotch-Irish hinterland; the Conservatives were the property holders, the businessmen, the respectable Philadelphia money men, the Eastern oligarchy.

However, the data do not fit easily into these categories. Each faction drew heavily from the Eastern commercial-professional-intellectual classes for its leadership: George Bryan, James Cannon, Joseph Reed, Charles Pettit, Blair McClenaghan, Thomas McKean, and John Bayard for the Radicals; James Wilson, George Clymer, Robert Morris, Benjamin Rush, and John Dickinson for the Conservatives. At the same time, each faction had a major contingent of Western leaders: the Whitehills, William Findley, and John Smiley for the Radicals; Hugh Henry Brackenridge, John Montgomery, Jasper Yeates, and George Woods for the Conservatives. Further inconsistencies result from the shifting nature of the alignments. The alignments of 1776 were not identical to those of 1780, or of 1790. New
men emerged, old leaders died or disappeared, and those who remained on the scene were not always consistent. Franklin, Reed, McKean, Findley, Rush, Clymer, Bayard, and Paine all changed sides at least once, and few electoral units (the counties and the city of Philadelphia) consistently elected representatives from the same faction. Bucks County in the east was strongly Radical, and Bedford in the west was strongly Conservative until the middle of the 1780s when both reversed themselves. Chester in the east and Westmoreland in the west were frequently divided. York in the west was generally Conservative; Berks in the east was more frequently Radical; and Cumberland, the heartland of the "western Radical democrats," possessed a Conservative contingency which enjoyed an occasional electoral victory.

Something more than the Radical-Conservative framework is needed to account for these patterns of leadership recruitment and electoral support and for the shifts which occur in these patterns over the fifteen-year period. Additional evidence is necessary to give new perspective and new meaning to the contemporary comment on which the book relies so heavily. New thinking is needed to transcend the democratic-oligarchic, West-East, farmer-businessman, poor-rich conceptual dichotomies which structure the evidence. Until this is done, our understanding of the nature of politics in revolutionary Pennsylvania must remain ambiguous at best. However, in this process of reinvestigation and reconceptualization, Robert Brunhouse's The Counter-Revolution must remain the essential starting point.

State University of New York

Brockport, New York

Owen S. Ireland


Michael Pearson's book, as the title states, deals with the American Revolution from the British point of view. A British subject born in Buenos Aires, Pearson left school at sixteen to work as a reporter in a small London news agency; he has also written plays, magazine articles, short stories, and several nonfiction books.

His study of the Revolution through contemporary British rec-