# THE 1948 STATES' RIGHTS DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT IN TEXAS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

James P. Griffin, B.A.
Denton, Texas

August, 1979

LPK


## ABSTRACT

Griffin, James P., The 1948 States' Rights Democratic Movement in Texas, Master of Arts (History), August, 1979, v + 124 pp., bibliography, 38 titles.

The purpose of this paper is to examine, from a local perspective, the reaction of the southern conservative wing of the Democratic party to the liberal changes which occurred in that organization as a result of the transitional decades of the 1930s and 1940s. In particular, the study focuses on the growing sense of alienation and the eventual withdrawal of a handful of Texas Democrats from affiliation with the national body and their subsequent realignment with other dissident Dixie Democrats in the short-lived States' Rights party of 1948.

This work is based essentially on the personal recollections of Texans who participated in the States' Rights movement and on those papers of the party's leaders which have survived until today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

# INTRODUCTION

In the 1930s and 1940s, the national Democratic party experienced a disquieting reformation. Historically an exponent of decentralized government, of an agrarian society, and laissez faire, the Democratic party during the Great Depression and Second World War became an advocate of a mixed economy, the welfare state, and a strong centralized government. The vigorous presidential leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt, the charismatic legatee of twentieth century progressive liberalism, was largely responsible for this transformation. During his tenure as president, FDR successfully created a strong, effective, liberal coalition which subsequently challenged the conservatives for party control, and which continued to coalesce throughout the administration of President Harry S. Truman. The challenge presented by this political association of the urban working classes, disaffected Negroes, and liberal intellectuals was most keenly felt in the South, a region of the country with a tradition of conservatism easily traced to pre-revolutionary colonial America.

Initially assenting to the metamorphorsis of the party under the premise that unity was required in order to survive the economic and social chaos of the depression, southern conservatives realized too late the consequences

of their acquiescence and futilely attempted to restore their traditionally dominant position within the party. In 1948, unable to reestablish their influence with the inner councils of the party, many southern Democrats resorted to the one remaining political weapon available to them for preserving the traditions they cherished: the creation of a third party. The story of the States' Rights Democratic movement in Texas can serve as an example of the plight which the southern conservative wing of the Democratic party faced in 1948 as a result of the transitional decades of the 1930s and 1940s.

The study of the States' Rights Democratic movement in Texas began with a careful reading of Gary Ness's dissertation, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948." Ness's comment that more study was needed on the movement in Florida, Arkansas, and Texas prompted the challenge of this current work. Helpful appendices in the dissertation contained the names of a few Texans who played significant roles in the movement in the Lone Star State. The Directory Assistance of the Dallas Public Library was then used to trace these individuals. Letters of introduction were sent to the available addresses explaining the project and seeking assistance. Following this, many survivors and former party leaders of the movement here in Texas responded and agreed to provide what help they could. Trips were then made to many sections of the state to conduct personal

interviews, and these contemporaries provided invaluable assistance. First, their shared reminiscences brought to life the trials and tribulations they experienced in 1948. Also, many of these persons suggested other possible primary sources which were subsequently traced and utilized in this thesis. And finally, some of these individuals had carefully preserved their personal and political papers of 1948 and obligingly opened them for analytical study and historical interpretation. As a result, this work is based essentially on the personal recollections of Texans who participated in the States' Rights movement and on those papers of the party's leaders which have survived until today.

# CHAPTER I

## PROLOGUE TO DISENCHANTMENT: ROOSEVELT, TRUMAN, AND TEXAS DEMOCRATS, 1933-1947

The ascendancy of Franklin D. Roosevelt as President of the United States in 1933 generally pleased both liberal and conservative Democrats in Texas. The liberals, gratified at the similarity between the new president and Woodrow Wilson, believed that Roosevelt's election heralded the dawning of a new "progressive era." The conservatives, barely recovered from the ruinous candidacy of Al Smith in 1928, confidently expected that the new chief executive would reunite both the country and the party. Initially, Roosevelt did not disappoint either wing of the Texas Democracy as he moved quickly through the "first hundred days" of his administration. His confidence and determination to bring the country's worst economic depression under control assured Texans that his leadership was the exact antidote needed to cure the nation's ills. But as popular as the New Deal was in the Lone Star State, criticism of some of Roosevelt's domestic policies began to surface as Texans were pressured to conform to the demands of an expanding federal government.[1]

---

[1]William J. Brophy, "Origins of the Southern Conservative Revolt, 1932-1940" (Master's thesis, North Texas State University, 1963), p. iii.

The initial thrust of opposition to the New Deal in Texas came from entrenched political and economic interests which conceived the president's programs as a threat to their future. Early in 1934, many farmers and businessmen voiced the opinion that Roosevelt's agencies were depriving them of their economic independence and local initiative. Likewise, conservative Texas politicians criticized the increasing size of the federal bureaucracy, the growing centralization of governmental power in Washington, and the administration's excessive expenditures.[2] Another source of opposition came from a few individual Texans who thought Roosevelt's administration "was unduly sympathetic to labor unionism, reform of the sharecropping system, and, worst of all, the aspirations of the southern Negro." To many old-line Texas Democrats the president's policies were violating "some sacred right," and "the federal government was somehow tampering with something which it ought not."[3] It should be noted, however, that most of this dissension, while vocal and in some cases widespread, was unorganized and did not represent the majority of Texas Democrats, who

---

[2]Ibid.; William Jean Tolleson, "The Rift in the Texas Democratic Party--1944" (Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1953), pp. 2-3; Seth Shepard McKay, Texas Politics, 1906-1944 (Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1952), p. 382.

[3]Robert A. Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), pp. 4-5; Tolleson, "The Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," p. 2.

were instead, "more impressed by the benefits of Roosevelt's policies then they were disturbed by their assumed shortcomings."[4]

The 1936 presidential campaign only confirmed the popularity of Roosevelt and the New Deal in Texas. That summer, at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, the Texas delegation, led by Governor James A. Allred, Senator Tom Connally, and Rules Committeeman Beeman Strong, gave only token resistance to the abrogation of the party's one hundred year old two-thirds rule, the device by which the South had traditionally controlled the balance of power in the nominating process. Most Texas delegates believed, as did other southerners, that the rule had become superfluous since the party had begun to reflect a truly national image.[5] But a handful of anti-administration Texas conservatives disagreed with the delegation's performance. They viewed the abrogation of the two-thirds rule as a clear indication that FDR was insensitive to the historical legacies of the South and that he was determined to liberalize the party at the region's expense. This small group of dissidents subsequently organized their protest in the Constitutional Democrats of Texas, and although the

---

[4]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 6.

[5]Dallas Morning News, 24, 25, 26 June 1936; New York Times, 25 June 1936, p. 1.

movement failed to attract any significant following and initially included only a few concerned Texans, it does suggest, even in the light of Roosevelt's overwhelming victory in the Lone Star State, that the president and his policies were not universally accepted by Texas Democrats.[6]

The election results of 1936 indicate that most Texas Democrats were not inclined to oppose the national party. Although conservatives knew that Roosevelt was unreservedly accepting support from liberal intellectuals, Negroes, and the urban working classes, his policies made no substantial threat to the existing status quo. Besides, most of the president's rhetoric, though it frightened some Texans, promised a return to normalcy without endangering conservatism. The Supreme Court's invalidation of several portentous New Deal programs likewise championed the cause of conservative constitutional government and moderated any fears that the national government could indiscriminately usurp state authority by enacting obnoxious federal legislation.[7] But in the early days of February, 1937, this tranquility and trust were shattered. Roosevelt, riding high on the crest of the greatest presidential election victory in American history, conceived his achievement as a

---

[6]Tolleson, "The Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," pp. 5-8.

[7]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 8; Brophy, "Conservative Revolt," p. 101.

mandate "to press harder for reform legislation and to remove all possible obstacles to his designs."[8] As a result, he proposed reorganizing the federal judiciary, and in 1938, he attempted to purge the party of disloyal Democrats who interfered with the implementation of his program.

Texans were almost unanimously opposed to the president's "court packing" scheme, and their repugnance was most noticeably demonstrated in Washington. In the nation's capital, Texas Congressman Hatton Sumners, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, and Sam Rayburn, Speaker of the House, worked together closely to insure the defeat of the proposal. In the Senate, Vice President John Nance Garner and Senator Tom Connally advanced the cause of constitutional government by helping spearhead a strong conservative bloc in opposition to the plan. The defection of these previously moderate supporters, especially Connally, clearly signified the antipathy many Texans felt toward Roosevelt's attempt to change the constitutional system to insure the sanctity of his programs. It should be noted, however, that despite the uproar this plan created, very little sectional rhetoric was employed during the debate. Texans simply did not consider this issue regional.[9]

---

[8]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 8-9.

[9]Brophy, "Conservative Revolt," pp. 30-33.

Roosevelt's efforts to remove opposition elements from the Democratic party likewise met stern resistance. Texas Democrats believed that the president had no business interfering in the election of members of Congress, whether they were liberals, moderates, or conservatives. Roosevelt's efforts to eliminate intraparty opposition, to have all members conform to his every wish, they believed, was a dangerous usurpation of party prerogative and an unwarranted encroachment into state politics. Again, however, as with the plan to pack the Supreme Court in 1937, the attempted purge was national in scope, not regional. Consequently, opposition oratory failed to reflect a sectional bias; a truly southern position did not emerge.[10]

FDR's proposal to reorganize the federal judiciary and his subsequent bid to realign the Democratic Congress ended in resounding defeats. To entrenched interests in Texas, however, these were not the only ostensible threats to their security. During 1937 and 1938, as economic problems continued, troubles erupted between labor and management in many industrial sections of the country. Organized labor was not firmly rooted in Texas, and as a result, the state was spared the consequences of industrial conflicts. That did not preclude the possibility of future difficulties.

---

[10]Tolleson, "Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," p. 11; Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 10.

The Congress of Industrial Organizations, a recent amalgamation of industrial unions, was contemplating organizing Texas oil workers. The prospect of the CIO succeeding in such an endeavor and the fact that Roosevelt had refused to intervene in previous labor-management disputes gave some Texans reason to worry about the safety of their interests. Governor Allred, who questioned the legality of CIO methods, particularly the sit-down strikes, believed the president's aloofness suggested he favored the unions' cause. To Texas business interests, already skeptical about many New Deal policies, Roosevelt's passivity was inexcusable.[11]

By the election campaign of 1940, conservative Texas opposition toward Roosevelt that had begun as simple vocal discontent in the 1930s became substantially more antagonistic. Joining forces with other anti-New Dealers, Texas conservatives, in the name of tradition, opposed the growing movement to renominate FDR for a third term. In an atmosphere lacking in sectional rhetoric, the Lone Star delegation attended the national convention instructed to nominate John Nance Garner for president. But in Chicago their efforts were thwarted. Roosevelt's forces, working behind the scenes, controlled the party machinery, and the President easily swept the convention. The conservative faction of the Texas delegation was furious at the

---

[11]Brophy, "Conservative Revolt," pp. 56-57.

manipulation of the nomination and returned to the Lone Star State bitterly disappointed.[12]

In Texas, anti-administration conservatives reacted angrily to Roosevelt's nomination. In late July, some members of the conservative wing of the State Democratic party organized anti-third term Democratic clubs throughout the state, and in August, allied themselves with the remnants of the 1936 Constitutional Democrats. The resulting organization was called the No-Third-Term Democratic Party, and it worked assiduously, albeit unsuccessfully, during the campaign to weaken the shackles of party regularity that bound Democratic stalwarts. Still, most Texas Democrats, although growing restive with the increasingly liberal course taken by the administration, believed that to break with the party "and to defy Roosevelt would be tantamount to repudiating the South's political heritage."[13]

During the thirties, it is apparent that dissident Texas and Southern Democrats had little reason to consider abandoning the party of their forefathers. FDR's policies, while disturbing to conservatives, were designed to relieve

---

[12]Tolleson, "Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," pp. 13-15; James MacGregor Burns, Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956), pp. 426-428; Brophy, "Conservative Revolt," pp. 95-97.

[13]Tolleson, "Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," pp. 16-17; quote is from Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 12.

poverty and misery brought on by the depression, not to subjugate southern lifestyles and traditions. Although the urban coalition had grown stronger and continually gained favor with the president, Roosevelt had diplomatically avoided compromising situations and had resisted demands which might have jeopardized his relationship with Dixie Democrats. The undercurrent of opposition which appeared during the decade did not argue against the administration by using sectional rhetoric, but rather, expressed itself in terms of economic and constitutional principles. Resistance in Texas and the South, therefore, seems to have been more firmly rooted in conservatism than southernism. Hence, the Democratic party below the Potomac was still secure as the shadow of war approached in the early forties.

The need to utilize manpower and resources for the defense program in 1940-41 gave anti-administration Texans the impression that the New Deal was ebbing and that business activity was beginning to normalize. But in order to guarantee productive stability in this time of crisis, FDR created a series of war agencies which conservatives feared could be used to promote social reform, particularly in labor-management relations. The National Defense Mediation Board's capitulation to the pay differential demands of the United Mine Workers twice in 1941 only reinforced these misgivings. Anxieties were accelerated later in June, when

the president, faced with a civil rights protest march on Washington, inaugurated the Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC), the administration's "first open commitment to a policy of racial equality in employment practices." Roosevelt's apparent acquiescence to the demands of labor and Negroes, "at the expense of that pedestal of the Democratic party, the South," intensified anti-administration sentiment in the Lone Star State.[14] Thus, by the midterm elections of 1942, several Texas candidates for national office, notably senatorial candidate W. Lee O'Daniel, began using decidedly sectional rhetoric rather than conventional anti-Roosevelt themes in their campaign oratory to defeat their New Deal opponents.[15]

Further problems erupted in the nation's industrial centers during the early months of 1943. Labor unions, eager to exploit the political and economic advantages which the military crisis afforded, ordered walkouts and strikes in many of the country's vital industries. Roosevelt's inclination to placate the unions, ostensibly in the interest of national unity, displeased Texas and southern conservative Democrats who thought his action smacked of political coddling. Subsequently, Senator Connally, in

---

[14]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 13-15, 18-26.

[15]McKay, Texas Politics, p. 382.

collaboration with Congressman Howard W. Smith of Virginia, initiated legislation to prohibit labor disputes from interfering with war production and to make political contributions by unions illegal. Connally's efforts clearly reflected Texans' desires "to prevent labor from securing more political and economic gains from the war," and to discourage "the growing partnership of the Democrats and the labor unions." The ensuing struggle over the Smith-Connally Act (the president vetoed the bill but was overriden) exemplified the growing division between the administration and the conservatives, and exposed the increasing influence of the urban coalition within the councils of the Democratic party. This revelation and its attendant suggestion "that the administration and its congressional supporters were now more susceptible" to the demands of liberal intellectuals, union organizers, and civil rights advocates, presented an ominous threat to the political structure of the South, including Texas. Consequently, southern conservatism rapidly evolved "into a reinvigorated, self-conscious southernism."[16]

During 1943 and 1944, a series of potentially explosive political events intensified sectional identity and broadened the base of opposition to FDR's administration

---

[16]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 38-41.

among Texas Democrats. In the summer of 1943, CIO leadership, convinced that the best means of achieving their aspirations was through the direct influence of government policy, created the Political Action Committee (PAC) to serve as labor's political arm. Designed to formulate and publicize labor's legislative programs, raise election campaign contributions, and mobilize voters, the CIO-PAC claimed to be nonpartisan.[17] But the close relationship between President Roosevelt and Sidney Hillman, chairman of the PAC and former head of the Office of Production Management, precluded in the minds of most conservative Texans any possibility of the organization's neutrality or of the administration's detachment. Thus, the PAC's endorsement of FDR for a fourth term in 1944 came as no surprise. The announcement formalized the labor-Democratic party alliance and reaffirmed for anti-New Deal Texans the declining prestige and authority of the South within the councils of the Democratic party.[18]

Likewise ominous was Roosevelt's vacillating association with the Negro community. Negro leaders since the beginning of the war had pressured the president to

---

[17]Alonzo L. Hamby, Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 34.

[18]Interview with Mrs. F.R. Carlton, Dallas, Texas, 20 August 1974.

institutionalize the democratic ideals that the country was fighting for overseas. Careful with what he realized could be a potentially volatile relationship, the president discreetly steered to the middle of the road, anxious not to offend either Negroes or southerners. But Roosevelt's cautious approach to Negro leaders aroused resentment among many Texas conservatives who believed that his ambivalent position on racial issues was an unqualified solicitation for their support. Further, his equivocal deprecation of racial violence in the South during the summer of 1943 (which included a two-day riot in Beaumont), the social welfare proposals mentioned in his 1944 State of the Union address, and the administration's surreptitious overtures made to Negroes, convinced many Texans that FDR placed a high priority on the support of influential Negroes. Even though no formal alliance emerged between Negroes and the administration, sectional rhetoric flourished as Texans' confidence in Roosevelt deteriorated further.[19]

Additional confirmation that the administration was courting the favor of the urban coalition occurred in March 1944, when the Supreme Court declared that the exclusion of Negroes from the Texas Democratic primaries was unconstitutional. Texas Democrats had contended that party primaries

---

[19]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 60-72, 81-90; interview with Mrs. Nowlin Randolph, Austin, Texas, 13 September 1974.

were private functions of the party, not elections, and that Negro participation in such activities was prohibited on the grounds that they were ineligible for party membership. The Smith v. Allwright decision, however, concluded that the party primaries were an integral function of the state's election machinery, and while not an election as such, they were an important step in the electoral process. To deny Negroes the opportunity to share in that process, therefore, was a violation of the Fifteenth Amendment. Because the president had appointed most of the Supreme Court justices, and because he was an alleged pawn of civil rights advocates, anti-New Deal forces in the Lone Star State reasoned that Roosevelt had played a significant role in the Court's ruling. The subsequent enfranchisement of the Negro, they feared, would set a precedent, and, consequently, encourage the so-called Roosevelt coalition to push for further reforms in both the political and social structure of the South.[20]

In the 1940s, during presidential election years, Texas Democrats held two state conventions, one in May, the other in September. The spring meeting, or Presidential convention, selected delegates to and devised strategy for the national convention and named the party's presidential

---

[20]Interview with Merritt H. Gibson, Longview, Texas, 13 July 1974.

electors. The fall convention, or Governor's convention, certified the proceedings of the May gathering and any state primaries held during the intervening months. With the specter of Reconstruction rising from the past, anti-administration Texas conservatives gained control of the State Presidential Convention in May 1944, and headed for the Democratic National Convention in Chicago determined to free the party from the subjugation of the northern urban-liberal coalition.[21]

In the Windy City, the national credentials committee faced rival delegations from Texas, one conservative, the other liberal, and both claiming to be the legitimate voice of Lone Star Democrats. Unable to reconcile the opposing factions, the committee suggested that both delegations be seated and their votes equally divided. When the convention accepted this recommendation, the conservative delegation walked out in protest, dramatically demonstrating the depth of anti-administration feelings among Texas Democrats. Later in the fall, these anti-New Dealers, failing to maintain control of the state party, created an independent third party known as the Texas Regulars. Their campaign to teach Texas voters the importance of voting their principles rather than a party label failed initially

---

[21]Tolleson, "Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," pp. 22, 34-54; interview with Arch H. Rowan, Fort Worth, Texas, 20 July 1974.

to achieve its goal; the election results proved Roosevelt still had incontestable control of the party. Nonetheless, the Texas Regulars movement significantly confirmed the deep schism which had been developing within the Democratic party since 1936 and ominously foreshadowed the party's future in the Lone Star State.[22]

Superficially, much of the party rancor of 1944 subsided in 1945, especially after the death of Roosevelt in April. His successor, Harry S. Truman, was a man about whom little was known, but who was friendly with all factions of the party. Truman's senatorial friendships with Sam Rayburn, Tom Connally, and John Nance Garner, led anti-New Deal Texans to trust him with their confidence. They also supported Truman because he did not seem liberal; he simply did not fit the Roosevelt pattern as a "liberal crusader."[23] Consequently, Texas conservatives believed that chances for the restoration of southern influence in the party under Truman's direction were excellent, and that future relations with the executive branch and the national party would be undoubtedly affable.[24]

---

[22]Tolleson, "Rift in the Texas Democratic Party," pp. 56-61, 69-108; McKay, Texas Politics, pp. 444-454; Gibson interview.

[23]Herbert S. Parmet, The Democrats: The Years After FDR (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), p. 18; Hamby, Beyond the New Deal, pp. 41, 45-47.

[24]Gibson interview.

Truman's honeymoon with Texas and southern Democrats, however, was short-lived. As World War II drew to a close, the need to design substantial demobilization and reconversion policies became more urgent if serious unemployment and economic contraction were to be avoided. After an equivocal bout with Congress over creating a permanent Fair Employment Practices Commission, a preliminary scrimmage which pleased neither southern conservatives nor civil rights advocates, Truman announced in September a 21-point program for reconversion. In a lengthy message to Congress, the president broadly outlined his postwar economic program which included a recommendation for full employment legislation, a request to extend price controls, and an appeal for legislation to settle industrial disputes. This program clearly demonstrated Truman's "intention to preserve the concept of a dynamic executive who would guide the direction of legislation," and who wanted to institutionalize and expand the reform spirit of the New Deal. The enthusiasm which this plan generated among civil rights groups, labor unions, and social improvement organizations left no doubt that Truman was aligning himself with the urban coalition. As a result, many Texas Democrats became disaffected with the administration.[25]

---

[25]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 136-61, 165; interview with W. Clyde Odeneal, Dallas, Texas, 17 August 1974.

The Taft-Hartley Labor-Management Relations Act passed by Congress in mid-summer 1947 was the first opportunity disenchanted Texans and other southern Democrats had to change the direction of Truman's policies. A highly controversial measure, the act substantially curbed the economic power and political influence of the labor unions, and equalized the advantages of management with those received by labor during the New Deal. Because labor leaders and liberals so strongly opposed this bill, anti-administration Texans believed that if Truman would only sign it, he could reinstate himself with the southern conservative wing of the party.[26] President Truman, however, concerned with impressing the liberals of his qualifications as standard-bearer for the 1948 election, vetoed the bill. Although Congress acted swiftly in overriding the veto, Truman won the praises of middle-class liberals and organized labor for his decisive action. He created the opposite reaction, however, from a growing coterie of anti-Truman Texas Democrats who considered his veto a deliberate disregard of presupposed southern support.[27]

Texas' relations with Washington became even more strained over the issue of tidelands ownership. In early

---

[26]Carlton interview

[27]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 214-19; Carlton, Odeneal interviews.

September 1945, President Truman decided, in the interest of conserving valuable offshore oil deposits, to place the country's coastal tidelands under the jurisdiction of the federal government. A chorus of protest immediately arose from Texas, California, and southern politicians who claimed that to remove the tidelands from the management of the states would mean surrendering the revenues from oil leases to the federal government. This income, they said, was invaluable to the fiscal administration of their states. Texas Congressman Hatton W. Sumners led the opposition to the administration's scheme and introduced quit claim legislation calling on the federal government to renounce its rights to the disputed coastal areas. President Truman, however, unable "to approve a measure aimed to nullify his own proclamation," vetoed the resolution in July, 1946.[28]

Initially, the tidelands controversy was national in scope. In the summer of 1947, however, when the Justice Department filed suit in federal court against the offshore claims of Texas and Louisiana, the issue took on regional implications. It represented to many opponents "a prime example of the much-feared widening of the dominion of the federal government."[29] The question of states' rights

---

[28]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 161-163.

[29]Ibid., p. 163.

versus national rights, "the language of the sectional controversy," rapidly became paramount. At the Southern Governors' Conference held in Ashville, North Carolina, in October, the question of tidelands ownership received considerable attention. Governor Beauford Jester of Texas assumed leadership and earnestly pleaded with his colleagues "for regional solidarity in defense of regional causes." Other southern governors quickly realized "the theoretical implications of the 'loss' of land previously thought to be [their] own," and pledged their support against further encroachment of the federal government into areas of state control. The tidelands issue thus succeeded, where other controversies had not, in unifying southern thought and awakening within southerners a sense of collective identity. Governor Jester, for his part, "appeared to be the southern governor whose opposition to federal policies was most apt to persist and, perhaps, harden into outright resistance."[30]

Anti-administration Texas Democrats soon had further evidence that Truman was aggressively seeking the support of the urban coalition. Quietly in December 1946, after numerous occurances of racial violence in the South during the summer and early fall, Truman created the President's

---

[30]Gary Clifford Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1972), pp. 17-19.

Committee on Civil Rights "to investigate law enforcement procedures and recommend measures to safeguard the civil rights of minorities."[31] Potentially, this committee, composed of several distinguished liberals, constituted a serious threat to the social fabric of the South, although Truman hoped southerners would accept the committee as merely an investigatory body. Many Texans, however, had little doubt about Truman's ideological predilections, and they knew that in the interest of attracting Negro support, the president's move was "an irreversible commitment to the cause of civil rights."[32]

Twice during 1947, Truman's rhetoric seemed to reaffirm this commitment. On June 30, addressing an NAACP rally in Washington, Truman advocated the need for legislation to end discrimination. The president did not commit himself to any specific recommendations, but Negro leadership, nonetheless, expressed confidence in his intentions. Also during this time, the President's Committee on Civil Rights had been deliberating, and in October published its report with the inauspicious title, To Secure These Rights. This report boldly indicted Jim Crow as the source of

---

[31]Harvard Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics," Journal of Southern History 37 (November, 1971): 599.

[32]Hamby, Beyond the New Deal, p. 188; Gibson interview; quote is from Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 202.

minority group problems and shrewdly suggested several procedures that the government could inaugurate to eliminate racial discrimination. President Truman examined the recommendations and, subsequently, announced his satisfaction with the findings. Here again, however, he made no overt promise to implement any of the proposals.[33]

Until Truman's incursion into the race issue in 1947, Texas Democrats who felt alienated from the administration and the inner councils of the party had little reason to seriously contemplate bolting the national organization. Hostility to Truman's policies was far from unified; sentiments in most areas ranged from a passive disapproval of national interference in state affairs to a mildly active antagonism to its spread. The list of grievances which Texans allegedly suffered during the Roosevelt and Truman years, while lengthy, lacked catalytic properties capable of kindling a full-scale rebellion. But in the spring of 1948, President Truman touched a nerve which sent the Dixie wing of the Democratic party into convulsions.

On February 2, acting upon campaign strategy for the approaching election, Truman asked Congress for legislation to guarantee the civil rights of minorities. The votes of the urban coalition he was told were more important to his

---

[33]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 227, 221-25; Sitkoff, "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948," pp. 599-600.

chances of success than those of the South. Likewise, he could confidently initiate any policies he wished; the South was so bound to party traditions that it was powerless to rally any significant unified resistance.[34] But Truman's strategists underestimated the strength and depth of political discontent which had been steadily growing since the early days of the New Deal. The president's speech clearly constituted a threat to the social, political, and economic structure of the South of greater magnitude than had been theretofore realized. The civil rights message bridged the gap of disunity and became the spark which ignited the fuse to the southern Democratic rebellion of 1948.[35]

---

[34]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, pp. 230-31; Hamby, Beyond the New Deal, pp. 209-10.

[35]Gibson interview; Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," pp. 37-38.

## CHAPTER II

## A SEASON OF RHETORICAL DISSENSION: SPRING, 1948

Harry S. Truman was the first president since Reconstruction to recommend to Congress a totally comprehensive legislative program on civil rights. Incorporating most of the proposals suggested by his Committee on Civil Rights, President Truman, on February 2, 1948, called for abolition of the poll tax, anti-lynching legislation, prohibition of discrimination in interstate transportation, curtailment of segregation in the armed forces and civil service, and a permanent FEPC. With this proclamation, Truman unequivocally committed his administration "to the advancement of equal opportunity and legal rights for Negroes," and simultaneously spawned a storm of protest from Dixie Democrats.[1]

In Texas, Governor Beauford Jester noted that the civil rights message was indicative of the liberal trend threatening to destroy the principles of the federal system upon which the United States was founded. Likewise, Representatives Omar Burleson of Anson and Ed Gossett of Wichita Falls criticized the President for his demagoguery and his crass surrender to the caprices of the urban coalition at the expense of southern fidelity. Senator Tom Connally

---

[1]Hamby, Beyond the New Deal, p. 214.

also railed against Truman's program calling it a violation of the Constitution, a total disregard for Democratic party traditions, and an unambiguous invasion of states' rights. Thus, while liberals and Negro leaders hailed Truman's proposals, official Texas reaction was noticeably negative.[2]

It is instructive to note that just a few weeks before Truman's address, several Texas and southern Democrats, who were disenchanted with the administration, had met in conference at New Orleans to discuss organizing grass roots opposition to the President.[3] Prominent among the participants were Merritt Gibson of Longview and Palmer Bradley of Houston. Gibson, a conservative attorney who had served two terms in the Texas State Legislature and twice as the County Judge of Gregg County, was a member of the State Democratic Executive Committee in the early 1940s, and then director of the Texas Regulars movement in 1944. Gibson's lifelong residence in East Texas, an area of the state politically, philosophically, and geographically contiguous to the South, undoubtedly had a compelling effect upon his adherence to traditional Democratic party principles, and

---

[2]Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," pp. 38-39; Dallas Morning News, 4 February 1948; New York Times, 29 February 1948, p. 1.

[3]Merritt H. Gibson to Arch Rowan, 14 January 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Palmer Bradley Papers, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Bradley Papers).

gave him a perspective on constitutional government that clearly reflected the region's conceptual devotion to states' rights. His political and personal experiences made him a natural leader at the New Orleans conference, and even before Truman issued his civil rights manifesto, Gibson believed that the administration could be successfully challenged without abandoning the Democratic party.[4]

Palmer Bradley was a lawyer by profession and an authority on oil and gas law. During the 1920s, with a few friends from the Houston area, he helped create a small but profitable petroleum enterprise. A native of Tioga, a hamlet fifty miles north of Dallas, Bradley had a strong sentimental attachment to the Confederacy and was adamantly devoted to the principles for which it stood. This loyalty made him antagonistic toward the Republican party and increasingly hostile toward the Democratic party for its treatment of the South during the 1930s and 1940s. Although he was sympathetic toward the elderly and supportive of such measures as old-age pensions and social security, Bradley was, nonetheless, distrustful of the federal government's interference in the affairs of the states and the people. Like Gibson, Bradley was greatly concerned with the growing influence of the urban-liberal

---

[4]Gibson interview; Gibson to author, 25 November 1974.

coalition, but he was initially resigned to defying Truman without deserting the party.[5]

At the New Orleans conference, the tidelands question and the issues raised by the President's Committee on Civil Rights became the central themes of opposition. Plans were laid to unify regional resistance at the forthcoming Democratic national convention, and Governor Jester, who had emerged as the champion of states' rights in the tidelands fight at the October Southern Governors' Conference, was chosen as the personality around which the resistance would revolve. Truman's civil rights message, coming as it did shortly after this meeting, only added tinder to an already smoldering fire.[6]

The President's civil rights message stiffened anti-administration opposition in Texas, and an atmosphere of resentment and outrage swiftly replaced the confident calm of the New Orleans meeting. Because national party leaders failed to compromise Truman's proposals, many anti-Truman Texas Democrats aligned themselves with Mississippi Governor Fielding L. Wright when he called for a South-wide conference to organize plans for an all-out fight against

---

[5]Robert L. Bradley to author, 6 November 1974; interview with Robert L. Bradley, Houston, Texas, 7 August 1974.

[6]Gibson to Rowan, 14 January 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers. Jester was not in attendance at this meeting.

the administration.[7] More cynical and zealous Texans, enraged over the administration's apparent indifference to southern traditions and life styles, freely encouraged "unbridled fears of federal encroachment and racial amalgamation."[8] Rumors that Texans might again participate in an independent movement similar to the Texas Regulars of 1944 spread rapidly as Governor Jester was urged to endorse Governor Wright's petition and support "a favorable program for Southern political emancipation."[9]

By February 7, this mood of indignation was transmitted to Wakulla Springs, Florida, where nine southern governors, including Jester, met to consider the region's problems with Negro education. The issues raised by the President's proposals, however, became the focus of their attention as they cautiously considered how best to handle the potential crisis. The group eventually decided that a special committee should confer with National Party

---

[7]Telegrams, J. Hart Willis to Fielding L. Wright, and Gibson to E.B. Germany, 10 February 1948, Folder "1948 Correspondence," and clippings, Scrapbook #1, Mrs. F.R. Carlton Papers, Residence, Dallas, Texas (hereafter cited as Carlton Papers).

[8]Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," p. 39.

[9]Dallas Morning News, 5, 7 February 1948; telegrams, Arch Rowan to Jester, and Rice Tilley to Jester, 6 February 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Southern States' Rights 'Revolt' Data," Governor Beauford H. Jester Papers, Texas State Library and Archives, Austin, Texas (hereafter cited as Jester Papers).

Chairman J. Howard McGrath, and inform him of the region's determination to seek retaliatory action if Truman did not reverse his civil rights policies. Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina was selected to chair the committee which would reconvene at the Southern Governors' Conference scheduled for March 13 in Washington, D.C., and recommend a course of action to the united body. Anti-administration Texas Democrats, generally pleased with the governors' action, subsequently pledged their full support to Jester who had also been selected to serve on this special committee.[10]

The support which Jester received as a result of his participation in this meeting was not unexpected. Jester was an exceedingly aggressive individual with a politically keen mind, and it was generally acknowledged that the Coriscana native had won the 1946 governor's race by virtue of a large anti-CIO/PAC vote. His campaign pronouncements on Negroes and labor unionism indicated he occupied a decidedly conservative position. His subsequent denunciation of Truman and the Supreme Court for its stand on the question of tidelands ownership revealed a strong determination to resist the incursions of the federal government

---

[10]Dallas Morning News, 8, 9 February 1948; New York Times, 7 February 1948, p. 1, and 8 February 1948, p. 1; clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers; Tilley to Jester, 9 February 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights (Favoring Governor's Stand)," Jester Papers.

into state affairs. It was not idle talk when Jester's name was mentioned as a leading southern opponent to President Truman's policies.[11]

Although desiring a compromise from national party leaders to close the breach within the Democracy, Jester, nevertheless, wanted the South's position to be clearly understood. Not only was the issue of civil rights agitating the region, he believed, but the controversy over tidelands was likewise unresolved and clearly a matter of contention between the coastal states and the federal government. Jester saw both issues as an invasion of states' rights, and he wanted the administration to realize that if it continued to pursue policies repugnant to the South, southern support of Truman at the July national convention would be seriously jeopardized. Before the meeting with McGrath, however, he declined to openly commit himself to a party bolt, hoping instead that a settlement agreeable to all factions within the party could be reached.[12]

Shortly before the special committee was to meet with McGrath, Democratic congressmen from Mississippi and South

---

[11]Clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers; Gibson interview; Carlton interview; Odeneal interview.

[12]Jester to Governors Thurmond, Laney, Cherry, and William M. Tuck, 20 February 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights," Jester Papers; Dallas Morning News, 11 February 1948.

Carolina urged southern congressional delegations to unite behind the governors in a condemnation of Truman's civil rights proposals. The Texas delegation, however, was reluctant to follow this suggestion, choosing instead to maintain its traditional practice of not binding individual members to bloc actions. Nevertheless, seven Texans, Ed Gossett of Wichita Falls, Tom Pickett of Palestine, Olin Teague of College Station, W.R. Poage of Waco, O.C. Fisher of San Angelo, Wingate Lucas of Grapevine, and Lindley Beckworth of Gladewater, attended a caucus of fifty-three southern House Democrats. Gossett, as spokesman for the Texans, offered a resolution which "decried the proposed civil rights legislation as 'an invasion of the sovereignty of the states and [an] enlargement of federal power far beyond its clear limitation by the Constitution.'"[13] The caucus summarily adopted this and other resolutions, and appointed a twelve-man delegation, including Gossett, to accompany the southern governors when they presented their protest to McGrath.[14]

On February 23, the southern governors' special committee and the House delegation of Dixie Democrats conferred with the national party chairman for an hour

---

[13]Dallas Morning News, 18, 20 February 1948. Quote is from 21 February 1948.

[14]Ibid., 22 February 1948.

and a half. The meeting was cordial but unproductive. McGrath was "accommodating and reasurring," but he steadfastly declined to advise the administration to make any changes in its civil rights or tidelands policies. He offered to support the adoption of the weak civil rights plank of 1944 in the 1948 party platform, but such action, he confessed, would change nothing.[15] Governor Thurmond was likewise unyielding and promised that the leaders of the Democratic party "will soon realize that the South is no longer 'in the bag'."[16] Governor Jester agreed with the South Carolinian and noted that the conference had widened "the breach in party ranks."[17]

The refusal of Chairman McGrath to move toward compromise with southern Democrats on the question of civil rights gave new urgency to the problem of how to induce the national Democratic party to be more considerate of the desires of its southern members. Texans were by no means united on how best to achieve this goal. Some party leaders suggested working the problem out in the state and national conventions while others called for steadfast

---

[15] A short, informative description of the conference based on the transcript of the meeting is found in Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 239.

[16] New York Times, 24 February 1948, p. 1.

[17] Dallas Morning News, 24 February 1948.

support of the President and the national party organization. A considerable portion of the State Democratic Executive Committee, including Chairman Robert W. Calvert of Hillsboro, a leader of the Democratic loyalists in the intraparty feud of 1944, pledged themselves to follow Governor Jester's leadership. Only a few Texas Democrats advocated unilateral action or a bolt of the party.[18]

While official reaction from key state leaders and party functionaries tended to confuse the political landscape, grass roots insurgents who desired a complete break from the national party, moved independently of the state organization to unite and sustain the growing hostility to the President. Eager to capitalize on Jester's conspicious animosity toward Truman, administration foes such as Palmer Bradley, Merritt Gibson, and Lloyd E. Price of Fort Worth, advised the governor to take "forthright and open action against the national organization that has repudiated and seceded from the timeless principles on which the party was founded."[19] Throughout the state, unrelated local

---

[18]Ibid., 25, 26 February 1948.

[19]See telegram, Gibson to Jester, 24 February 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights (Favoring Governor's Stand)," letter, Bradley to Paul H. Brown, 8 March 1948, and memo, Brown to Jester, 10 March 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Southern Governors' Conference," Jester Papers. Quote is from Lloyd Price to Jester, 25 February 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights (Favoring Governor's Stand)," Jester Papers.

organizations, unified only by their opposition to Truman, discussed the crisis facing southern Democrats and urged Jester "to fight for the South in her last stand to preserve state sovereignty."[20]

Typical of local opposition groups was the Southern Democratic Club of Dallas. Since organizing in April, 1944, to block "the domination of the Democratic Party by the radical element under the leadership of Henry Wallace," the Southern Democratic Club had worked tirelessly to promote grass roots participation in county, state, and national politics in an attempt to return local self-government to the people.[21] Led by club president J. Hart Willis and executive committee chairman E.B. Germany, both prominent Dallas attornies, and executive vice-president Mary Carlton, secretary-treasurer of the Lone Star Schoolbook Depository, the club's 200-plus membership successfully promoted the ideals of conservative southern Democrats throughout Dallas and the neighboring counties. As early as 1945, the organization's leaders had considered creating a conservative southern political party, but no affirmative

---

[20]Telegram, J. Hart Willis et al to Jester, 27 February 1948, Folder "1948 Correspondence," Carlton Papers.

[21]Carlton to Editor, Wichita Daily Times, 4 March 1946, Folder "Correspondence to 1948," Carlton Papers.

action had been taken.[22] Shortly after McGrath rejected the southern governors' request that Truman reconsider his proposed civil rights reforms, however, the club met in executive session and initiated plans for eventually controlling the state party machinery and propagating the ideology of conservative southern Democrats.[23]

Governor Jester, meanwhile, found himself occupying an unenviable political position. Although applauded by some for his sharp criticism of Truman's civil rights proposals and the administration's general position on the question of tidelands ownership, the governor worried about the support he would receive from the State Executive Committee. Torn by schisms which erupted in 1944, the executive committee was rife with conservative and liberal factions, each competing to dominate the party machinery. Jester desperately needed the backing of the state organization if he intended to win reelection in the fall; to alienate unnecessarily one group at the expense of the other could have a profound effect upon that ambition.[24]

---

[22]Carlton to E.B. Germany, 5 April 1945, and Carlton to E.E. Townes, 20 September 1946, Folder "Correspondence to 1948;" Carlton to Gibson, 30 January 1948, Folder "1948 Correspondence," Carlton Papers.

[23]Minutes, Executive Committee Meeting, Southern Democratic Club, 10 March 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers.

[24]Rowan interview.

While the governor wrestled with this dilemma, Party Chairman Calvert was in Dallas addressing a meeting of the County Democratic Executive Committee. In his speech, Calvert intimated that Texas Democrats might desert Truman but not the party. "The only hope of salvation for the South," he said, "lies in remaining in the Democratic party and fighting aggressively for party policy which meets the approval of the people of the South." He suggested that Texas Democrats could best voice their protest against Truman by sending an uninstructed delegation to the Democratic national convention. Jester subsequently endorsed Calvert's plan in an effort to maintain control of the state party while still displaying his repugnance for Truman's policies. In so doing, he began steering a course to the middle-of-the-road.[25]

Merritt Gibson and Palmer Bradley, fearing that the lessons of 1944 were being ignored, quickly castigated Jester for his decision to follow Calvert's lead. Gibson was concerned most with the fact that Jester failed "to take a firm stand or to advocate any plan of action beyond the Philadelphia convention." If the leaders of the Democratic party in Texas "take this position in advance of the national convention," Gibson said, "we may be sure of the continuation of the present policy of treating the

---

[25]Dallas Morning News, 29 February and 6 March 1948.

South with contempt and scorn."[26] Bradley, likewise disturbed by Jester's position, echoed Gibson's anxiety. In a letter to his friend Paul Brown, Texas Secretary of State, he said, "Any protest that we make will be entirely ineffective unless we are prepared to go beyond the Philadelphia convention." Without such preparation, Bradley added, "we are going to be morally bound to support the nominee of the convention." The Houston lawyer did not want to "let matters drift," but instead desired to see Jester commit the State Democratic party to a long-range course of action, one reflecting the dissidence of Texas Democrats.[27]

Cognizant that the support of conservative Texas Democrats was beginning to waver, Governor Jester traveled to Washington on March 12 for the gathering of the southern governors, as agreed at Wakulla Springs. Upon arriving, Jester quickly discovered that the temperament of the South generally paralleled the anti-administration sentiment expressed in Texas, and that the number of southern governors willing to initiate reprisals had increased since their meeting on February 23. An atmosphere of dissatisfaction with McGrath's intransigence and Truman's continued advocacy of civil rights permeated the conference and

---

[26]Gibson to Bradley, 7, 6 March 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[27]Bradley to Brown, 8 March 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Southern Governors' Conference," Jester Papers.

helped the participants focus their efforts on deciding how best to repudiate the administration.[28]

After a day of discussion led by Strom Thurmond, the eight southern governors who attended the conference issued an eleven page manifesto "aimed at keeping Mr. Truman or any other advocate of his civil rights program from being nominated or elected."[29] Specifically, the document labeled Truman's actions as an attempt "to break down the tradions, customs and laws of the states dealing with separation of the races." It called upon southerners, working within the party structure, to repudiate the existing party leadership, to oppose the civil rights program and those who sympathized with it, and to urge the restoration of the two-thirds rule in the Democratic national convention. The method through which this action might be implemented was left to the individual states because of their varied election laws and party procedures. The most significant resolution, and the one which most clearly suggested the possibility of a southern revolt, was the governors' recommendation to southerners that they withhold their states' electoral college votes from any nominee of the national Democratic party who advocated "such invasions of state

---

[28]Dallas Morning News, 13 March 1948; Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," pp. 53-57.

[29]Dallas Morning News, 14 March 1948.

sovereignty as those proposed [by Truman]." Each signatory pledged to exert his influence in his respective state to achieve this goal. In signing this document, Governor Jester made a firm commitment and placed Texas directly in in the front lines in the battle against Truman.[30]

The following week, Governor Jester proceeded to make comments portending continuous resistence to Truman and his policies. The southern governors' declaration of March 13, Jester said, made "'a clear case that Democratic leaders have moved away from the principles of party and of Constitutional government.'" Unless the President was willing to "change his ways," the governor predicted, he would find himself facing an uninstructed, and possibly hostile, Texas delegation at the national convention in July.[31] Despite these remonstrations, however, the governor continued to counsel resolving the quarrel within the party. Jester's reluctance to support a third party movement or a party bolt greatly disappointed Texas Democratic insurgents.[32]

---

[30]Copy, Committee Report Adopted by Southern Governors' Conference, 13 March 1948, Box 2, Folder "Miscellaneous," Bradley Papers.

[31]Dallas Morning News, 20, 16 March 1948.

[32]J. Hart Willis to Governor William Tuck, 12 April 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights (Favoring Governor's Stand)," Jester Papers; Roy Sanderford to Wright Morrow, 13 April 1948, Folder "Political File," Roy Sanderford Papers, Residence, Temple, Texas (hereafter cited as Sanderford Papers).

On the weekend following the Southern Governors' Conference in Washington, the State Party Chairmen of Arkansas and Mississippi issued an invitation to all "States' Rights Democrats from all the States," to attend a conference in Jackson, Mississippi on May 10. The purpose of the meeting was to draft a statement of "basic American principles of States' Rights," and to take decisive steps "as may be deemed proper and necessary for the preservation of Constitutional government." In effect, the conference would consider creating a separate political party, and "holding . . . a Southern Democratic convention to nominate Dixie's own candidates for President and Vice-President."[33]

At the same time the Jackson conference invitation was submitted, a state-wide opinion survey was released which indicated Texans' overwhelming opposition to Truman's civil rights proposals and their willingness to vote a southern Democrat president. Although the survey failed to note attitudes toward a third party movement, it was clearly evident that Texans desired some kind of anti-administration action.[34] Undoubtedly, Merritt Gibson considered this when

---

[33]Copy, Call for Conference of States' Rights Democrats, 20 March 1948, Folder "Political File," Sanderford Papers; Dallas Morning News, 24 March 1948.

[34]Mary Ellen Kuhlmann, "A Comparison of Texas and National Public Opinion from August, 1946 Through August, 1948" (Master's thesis, The University of Texas, 1949), pp. 45 and 89.

he accepted the invitation and announced that Lone Star Democrats would be represented at the Jackson meeting.[35] Thus, Texas Democratic insurgents joined other southern dissidents and took a significant step toward buttressing their rhetorical threats with resolute action.

As many Texas Democrats looked forward to answering President Truman's challenge at Jackson, local party officials began to develop strategies for controlling the upcoming precinct and county conventions to be held early in May. Such control was important for it promised them considerable influence at the state convention where the party's position on national issues would be formulated. But while anti-administration feelings ran high, considerable confusion and disunity prevailed on how best to thwart Truman's alledged invasion of states' rights. The Dallas County Democratic Executive Committee, for example, began meeting in late March to discuss the direction in which to steer its delegation to the state convention. The group unanimously opposed the President's program, but was divided on how best to demonstrate its antagonism. The dilemma facing the Democratic organization in Dallas County was not unique. Around the state, other County Democratic Executive Committees faced the same predicament.[36]

---

[35] Dallas Morning News, 24 March 1948.

[36] Clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers.

To help reduce this indecision within local party organizations and to moderate growing dissent between evolving rival factions, Governor Jester announced plans to launch a state-wide grass-roots campaign to create unity within the party so that the voice of Texas Democrats would have an impact at the national convention. In addition, Jester promised to deliver a major address at a fund-raising party barbecue in Fort Worth to clarify what he believed should be the position of Texas Democrats regarding a possible party bolt, should Truman win the nomination.[37]

Jester's optimistic call for party harmony, however, failed to dissipate the gathering clouds of dissension. From the left, charges of party disloyalty were hurled at both the governor and the State Democratic Executive Committee. Determined to pledge the Texas delegation to Truman, Woodville Rogers of San Antonio, a former state senator, and Dallas attorney Howard Dailey, leaders of the liberal Democratic faction, denounced the Jester affair as a gathering of anti-Trumanites and invited true Texas Democrats to a rival barbecue to be held near Waco.[38] On the right, the Southern Democratic Club and other Lone Star conservatives who opposed Truman's nomination, invited Virginia

---

[37] Dallas Morning News, 30 March and 9 April 1948.

[38] Ibid., 4 April 1948; Clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers.

Governor William M. Tuck to address a party rally in Dallas prior to the precinct and county conventions. In addition, they urged Governor Jester to adhere to the pledge he made in signing the southern governors' resolution on March 13. Instead of clearing, political skies over Texas were becoming darker.[39]

In the early evening of April 20, almost 1200 Texas Democrats gathered at Will Rogers Auditorium in Fort Worth for music, square dancing, and barbecue. At the climax of the festivities, Governor Jester strode to the microphone and delivered a speech that had a profound effect on Texas Democratic politics in 1948.[40]

In his opening remarks, Jester announced that "We Southerners are troubled in our own house," and then, for the remainder of his fifteen minute address, he castigated what he believed was the source of the region's problems: President Truman, his policies, and the national Democratic party. Alluding to the urban-liberal coalition's growing influence within the national party, Jester claimed that Truman had deliberately "launched a campaign of aggression upon the sovereignty and Civil Rights of the Southern States in the vain hope of winning the votes of

---

[39]Telegram, J. Hart Willis to Tuck, 1 April 1948, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers; Sanderford to Jester, 13 April 1948, Folder "Political File," Sanderford Papers.

[40]Dallas Morning News, 21 April 1948.

anti-Southern minorities in the boss-ridden cities of the North and East." As a result of this, he continued, the South was being "deprived of fair and equitable representation in the councils of the Party." Further, Jester said, the abrogation of the two-thirds rule "has brought about the desperate courtship of [northern] minority groups at the expense of the Party's life-long [southern] Democrats." In reference to the President's civil rights program, Jester charged that it was a "sharp totalitarian dagger . . . concealed beneath a false cloak of Democracy," and that not since Reconstruction had the South experienced such "insidious encroachments . . . upon [its] sovereignty and social institutions." The confiscation of Texas tidelands, also, the governor concluded, was a "dangerous blow aimed at States' rights and local self-government." Significantly, the question of race relations was not the paramount issue, but only one of many complaints that southern and Texas Democrats had against the President. According to the governor, the most immediate question facing Texans was, "How can we hold back the onrushing tide of centralized government which threatens to sweep away the liberties inherent in home rule?"[41]

---

[41]Copy, Address by Governor Beauford H. Jester, Texas Democratic Barbecue, 20 April 1948, Box 2, Folder "Speeches," Bradley Papers.

Jester's answer to this question was surprising. Despite his substantial list of grievances against the Truman administration and the national party leadership, he counseled fellow Democrats to make their protest in a responsible, controlled manner. "However bitter we are in the knowledge of our grievances," he said, "we must not retaliate blindly and rashly. Resolute determination is more likely to solve our problems."[42]

Resolute determination. What did it mean? To Jester it meant many things, but first and foremost, it meant not bolting the party. "Being Democrats by birth, by tradition, and by belief, we have no voice in the conduct of national affairs save through the Democratic Party. If we destroy that Party," Jester cautioned, "we will have destroyed our franchise." Resolute determination also meant instructing the Texas delegation to the national convention to write into the party platform a plank supporting the principles of states' rights and home rule. And finally, the governor's solution meant sending the Texas delegation to Philadelphia uncommitted as to a specific candidate. "A delegation instructed as to principles is without bargaining power if it is also instructed as to candidates," Jester contended. "We have no means of persuading a candidate to stand upon the platform which we desire if we

---

[42] Ibid.

pledge our support to him in advance. . . . The principles involved are far more vital to Texas and the South than any candidate."[43]

State-wide reaction to Jester's Fort Worth address was predictably mixed. Many of the state's leading newspapers generally supported the governor's plan of attack, but liberal and conservative opinion was conspicuously divided. Woodville Rogers, for example, sharply rebuked Jester for fraternizing with "Dixie Claghorns, the mimics of Bilbo and Rankin, and all but joining them." He also noted that any "party official or . . . democratic office holder who must 'hold his nose' to support the party leader is no asset."[44]

The bulk of criticism aimed at Jester, however, came from party conservatives. For example, Richard C. Andrade, a prominent conservative and independent oil producer from Dallas, congratulated Jester for his stand against Truman, but questioned the governor's wisdom in supporting the President should he win the nomination. Likewise, John Lee Smith of Lubbock, former Texas Lieutenant Governor, commended Jester for his opposition to Truman, but believed the method which he chose to demonstrate his antagonism

---

[43]Ibid.

[44]Mississippi's Senator Bilbo and Representative Rankin, two of the South's most ardent New Dealers, were also two of the region's most vicious racists. Clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers.

constituted "a pitiful surrender of [the] splendid position [he] had heretofore taken as one of the sponsors of independent action on the part of the South." J. Hart Willis, at a scheduled meeting of the Southern Democratic Club the day following the Fort Worth barbecue, also declared his disappointment with the governor's pledge of party regularity. Although Jester believed that his announced position was not a surrender of his principles, his critics were not so easily convinced.[45]

Less than two weeks after Jester had broadcast his statement, precinct and county conventions convened across the state and wrestled with the problems facing the Texas Democracy. The biggest issue was the question of sending an uninstructed delegation to the national convention as Jester had requested. The state's more populous counties, such as Dallas, Tarrant, Harris, and Bexar, found themselves in especially tight battles over this matter. Most States' Righters believed that they could support an uninstructed delegation provided it opposed all candidates favoring Truman's civil rights proposals. The moderates endorsed Jester's request that the delegation be sent uninstructed as to candidates but pledged to subsequently

---

[45]Andrade to Jester, 22 April 1948, Box 4-14/111, Folder "Correspondence 1948," and Smith to Jester, 27 April 1948, Box 4-14/93, Folder "Civil Rights (Letters that have been carded)," Jester Papers; Dallas Morning News, 22 April 1948.

support the party's nominee whoever that might be. Party liberals required a delegation faithfully committed to the President. After May 5, when the dust from the weekend struggles had settled, it was apparent that the pro-Jester forces would control the state convention scheduled to convene in Brownwood on May 25. Prospects for a harmonious meeting, however, seemed most unlikely as conservative Texans waited expectantly to see what southern Democrats would decide about a party bolt at Jackson, Mississippi.[46]

On May 10, several delegations of conservative Democrats from throughout the South gathered in Memorial Auditorium in Jackson, to develop a strategy for opposing Truman's threatened usurpation of states' rights and local self-government. Among the representatives from the Lone Star State were special delegations from the Southern Democratic Club of Dallas and the Democratic States' Rights Defense Committee of Houston. Many individuals from Fort Worth, Waco, Longview, and other East Texas towns were also present. Governor Jester, unable to attend because of a pressing obligation in Chicago that same day, sent Palmer Bradley as his personal representative.[47]

---

[46]Clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers.

[47]Ibid.; Jester to Bradley, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers. Bradley and the governor had been good friends in law school at the University of Texas and Bradley had worked in Jester's 1946 gubernatorial campaign in Houston.

The largest delegations at this South-wide conference of States' Rights Democrats came from Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and Arkansas. The remaining smaller southern state delegations were present unofficially; their respective State Democratic Executive Committees had not sanctioned their participation. Nevertheless, the sparse attendance did not deter the conferees. Their enthusiasm was adequately demonstrated when, moments before the opening gavel, the Texas delegation burst into a chorus of "The Eyes of Texas." Subsequently, Mississippi Governor Fielding L. Wright opened the meeting with a stirring address of welcome which boldly challenged the congregation "to chart a course which will bring the greatest measure of success to our efforts." Following Wright's introductory remarks, the conference adopted a resolution creating a permanent organization, and elected Governor Ben T. Laney of Arkansas permanent chairman and Mary Carlton of Dallas permanent secretary. Merritt Gibson and E.E. Townes, a Houston attorney, former vice president of Humble Oil, and Dean of the South Texas College of Law, were then appointed members of the resolutions committee.[48]

---

[48]Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 262; copy, Minutes of Conference of States' Rights Democrats, Jackson, Mississippi, 10 May 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers; profile on Townes from Houston Post, 1 February 1962, obituaries.

Another Texan, Arch Rowan, a Fort Worth rancher and oil man, was named to serve on the steering committee.[49]

When the formal organization was completed, Governor J. Strom Thurmond mounted the platform and gave an electrifying keynote speech. "We are going to fight as long as we have breath, for the rights of our states and our people under the American Constitution," Thurmond promised, "and come what may, we are going to preserve our civilization in the South." The South Carolinian then detailed how Truman's anti-poll tax, anti-lynching, anti-segretation, and FEPC proposals were inherently unconstitutional, and how such measures would violate the rights of Americans in general and southerners in particular. To avoid this, southern electoral votes, he said, could be used as "a powerful weapon to restore the prestige of the South in the political affairs of this Nation and preserve the American system of free constitutional government." Thurmond concluded with a warning to Truman and the leaders of the national Democratic party that if compromises were not secured in the civil rights program and if the principles upon which the party was founded were not reinstated, they should not expect southern support in the November election.[50]

---

[49]Rowan interview.

[50]Copy, Keynote Speech of Governor J. Strom Thurmond, 10 May 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers.

Amid thunderous applause for Thurmond's defiant stance, Governor Laney resumed his position on the platform and, with Merritt Gibson's assistance, guided the adoption of a declaration of principles and several resolutions. In this statement, the conferees resolved to "reestablish the Democratic Party on the principles for which it has always stood and to make use of the electoral vote to again demonstrate that no longer may the individual states be ignored in party councils and in the formulation of party policies." Specifically, the South was telling the leaders of the national party to repudiate Truman's civil rights proposals and affirm their loyalty to the party's traditional belief in states' rights. If this ultimatum were disregarded and if "a program [were] adopted at the Philadelphia Convention inconsistent with the principles" advanced at Jackson, southern Democrats threatened to reconvene in Birmingham, Alabama, on July 17, and there select substitute presidential and vice presidential candidates who would reflect the traditional ideologies of the Democratic party.[51]

Immediately following the recess of the conference, E.E. Townes convened a caucus of the Texas delegation in the Edwards Hotel to decide how best to maintain the

---

[51]Copy, Minutes of Conference of States' Rights Democrats, and copy, Declaration of Principles of Conference of States' Rights Democrats, Jackson, Mississippi, 10 May 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers.

momentum of the Jackson meeting in Texas. Townes suggested this might be accomplished through a state-wide publicity campaign aimed at soliciting the cooperation and support of uninstructed and unpledged county delegations before the state convention convened on May 25. The caucus accepted the challenge and then elected Merritt Gibson chairman of the campaign committee. A small sum of $225 was subsequently collected to initiate the group's activities, and a second committee was created to seek Governor Jester's assistance "in having the Brownwood Convention submit to the people of Texas the question of whether they desire to follow the other Southern states in the program adopted" at Jackson.[52] As the meeting adjourned, the Texans headed home with the knowledge that their actions inaugurated procedures for coordinating a unilateral, anti-administration movement in the Lone Star State.

---

[52]Copy, Minutes of Caucus of Texas Delegation Following Conference of States' Rights Democrats, Jackson, Mississippi, 10 May 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ROAD TO REBELLION: BROWNWOOD TO BIRMINGHAM VIA PHILADELPHIA, MAY TO JULY, 1948

The birth of the States' Rights Democratic movement at Jackson, Mississippi, was symptomatic of the deepening political crisis in the South during 1948. Many conservative southern Democrats, who feared that their interests in preserving home rule and party principles were being ignored by the Truman administration and by national party leaders, voiced their protests at the Jackson meeting. From this gathering the call went forth to the states to stand together in opposition to the civil rights proposals and to any presidential candidates who might support such legislation. The task set before Merritt Gibson and the Lone Star branch of the infant movement was to align Texas with the other states which espoused states' rights.

Without the support of Texas politicians, marshalling resistance to President Truman would not be easy. Merritt Gibson reasoned, therefore, that the state's political leaders had to be convinced that the majority of Lone Star Democrats opposed Truman and identified with the newly spawned States' Rights movement. If the conservatives were successful, then the state's twenty-three electoral votes could be bound to a presidential candidate who best

reflected the true states' rights principles of the Democratic party. To get the legitimate opinion of the voters, however, involved submitting a state-wide referendum at the July primary; to do this, permission had to be granted by either the May state convention or the State Democratic Executive Committee. Sensing that the conservative anti-Trumanites would control the balance of power at the state convention, and realizing that time was short, Gibson decided to submit his appeal for a referendum at Brownwood.[1]

During the week before Texas Democrats were to gather for their state convention, anti-Truman conservatives received word that party leaders would not oppose their referendum in the July primary.[2] As confirmation, Party Chairman Robert Calvert convened a "harmony conference" of rival party factions on the eve of the state convention in Brownwood. Representing the insurgents were Arch Rowan, Palmer Bradley, and former state senator Roy Sanderford. The most significant agreement reached at this parley was, according to the conservatives, the decision to have the convention consider granting permission for a state-wide

---

[1]Copy, Minutes of Caucus of Texas Democrats Following Conference of States' Rights Democrats, Jackson, Miss., 10 May 1948, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers; Gibson interview; clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers; Dallas Morning News, 16 May 1948.

[2]Lloyd Price to Arch Rowan, 19 May 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

referendum on the question of supporting party nominees who favored Truman's civil rights program.[3] Acting upon this understanding, States' Righters held an open caucus and framed their resolution with the admonition that "the people should be permitted to express their will at the ballot box on important public issues."[4]

On May 25, Calvert, acting as temporary chairman, called the State Democratic Presidential Convention to order. Organizing the convention was the first order of business and required several hours to complete. Toward early evening, after many turbulent hours of haggling, Albert Johnson of Dallas was elected permanent chairman. Subsequently, Houston attorney Wright Morrow, an anti-Truman delegate closely identified with the 1944 Texas Regulars, was elected Democratic National Committeeman. Morrow's election to this extremely powerful and influential position was a significant victory for the conservative wing of the party.[5]

---

[3]Dallas Morning News, 25 May 1948; clippings, Scrapbook #1, Carlton Papers.

[4]Houston Post, 25 May 1948; copy, A Resolution Submitted At Brownwood Convention, 25 May 1948, Folder "Texas," Merritt H. Gibson Papers, Residence, Longview, Texas (hereafter cited as Gibson Papers).

[5]Dallas Morning News, 26 May 1948; Houston Post, 26 May 1948.

At this point, Chairman Johnson presented the work of the Resolutions Committee to the assembled delegates. After perfunctory discussions, the convention adopted several resolutions. Conservative principles prevailed: opposition to the federal government's seizure of Texas tidelands; support for restoring the two-thirds rule; opposition to the civil rights proposals; and opposition to any attempt by the federal government "to invade [the] rights and powers of the states and the people thereof." Finally, revealing how well the Jester forces and the conservatives controlled the convention, the Texas delegation was directed to go to Philadelphia uninstructed as to candidates. No resolution was offered, however, on a referendum permitting Texas voters to express their opinion on supporting a presidential nominee who favored Truman's civil rights proposals. It had been defeated in committee.[6]

The conservatives were furious and charged Calvert with reneging on his "harmony conference" promise. Arch Rowan, when he learned of the recreancy, immediately went to Calvert and Johnson and demanded an explanation. Before the anti-Trumanites could organize a floor fight, however,

---

[6]Copy, Resolutions Adopted by Texas State Democratic Convention, Brownwood, Texas, 25 May 1948, Box 2, Folder "Miscellaneous," Bradley Papers; Dallas Morning News, 26 May 1948.

the national convention delegates were selected and the meeting adjourned.[7]

The Texas States' Rights Democrats were incredulous. They had adhered to every commitment made with respect to the moderates. They had prevented their coterie "from offering any amendments [to the proceedings] which would have delayed the convention or created the impression that there was any disagreement between the Jester forces and the State Rights group."[8] Why the governor had refused to cooperate was inexplicable. The unfortunate, unexpected reversal at Brownwood would require a revised strategy and suggested that the States' Righters' struggle would have to be carried to Philadelphia, and perhaps, beyond.

Although Governor Jester had been a caustic critic of the President since late 1947, his manipulation of the state convention revealed an unmistakable reluctance to agitate the anti-Truman issue. Texas insurgents, while disappointed with the governor, were not unduly discouraged. Instead, they resolved to solidify their efforts to control the party and to coordinate more closely their protest with other southern dissidents.

---

[7]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Rowan interview.

[8]Rowan to Jester, 27 May 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

During the weeks preceeding the national convention, recalcitrant Texas Democrats publicized their cause throughout the Lone Star State. They organized an East Texas States' Rights Democratic Club in Gregg County, formalized plans for the Birmingham conference, and invited Ben T. Laney, governor of Arkansas and chairman of the Conference of States' Rights Democrats, to address a state-wide radio audience from a fund-raising dinner in Dallas. On June 14, they asked the Jester-controlled State Democratic Executive Committee permission to submit their referendum in the July primary. The request was denied, but the insurgent's determination to restore the prestige of the South in the Democratic party persisted.[9]

The specter of a southern revolt hung heavily over Philadelphia on the eve of the Democratic national convention. Governor Jester, as chairman of a troubled and divided Texas delegation, sensed the need for a strategy session, and on July 10, he asked the delegates to meet with him in order to unite the group's factious elements. The division within the delegation, however, could not be so easily mended. States' Righters, while numbering only twelve among the fifty-member delegation, were gaining support for their demand that Texas join in a southern

---

[9]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Rowan interview.

walkout if the party nominated Truman. Governor Jester and his lieutenants managed to tenuously maintain control, however, and refused to be stampeded into an alliance with the Dixie bloc.[10]

The governor's leadership only momentarily checked the growing sentiment for repudiating the President. The following day, July 11, faced with a widely supported anti-Truman resolution, Jester was forced to compromise with the insurgents. In order to prevent a complete break with the President, Jester agreed to tell Truman that the Texas delegation would oppose his nomination unless he accepted the principles of states' rights in the national party platform. While this move generally appeased most Lone Star delegates, it further exasperated the dissidents.[11]

Later that same day, Ben Laney presided at a South-wide caucus "designed to coordinate the region's responses as well as to encourage and remind the individual delegates of the strength of their cause if they acted in concert."[12] Texans who attended the meeting realized a regional

---

[10] Dallas Morning News, 11 July 1948.

[11] Robert Bradley to author, 20 August 1974; minutes, First Caucus of Texas Delegation to Democratic National Convention, 11 July 1948, Miscellaneous Files-1948, Folder "Politics-National," Sam Rayburn Papers, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas (hereafter cited as Rayburn Papers).

[12] Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948."

unanimity with other southerners as they applauded numerous anti-Truman speeches and helped draft pro-states' rights resolutions. The question of a walkout, however, remained unresolved, and a consensus on candidates to oppose Truman was never achieved.[13] Nonetheless, the mood of the southerners and the apparent solidarity they expressed as a region clearly demonstrated that many were willing to sacrifice their allegiance to the national organization in order to preserve the principles upon which the Democratic party was founded and restore what they considered to be Dixie's historic role in American politics.

The Texas delegation held a second caucus on July 12, and the rift which had been growing in the group since it arrived at Philadelphia became irreparable. Many of the delegates were impatient with Jester's temporizing leadership and were eager to formalize their opposition to Truman and his anti-states' rights policies. Heated discussions ensued as Governor Laney came to the meeting and addressed the Texans with a lengthy attack on the party's national leadership. The delegation's leaders desperately tried to reestablish their control. The dissidents, however, finally had the upper hand, and by a narrow vote pledged

---

[13] Dallas Morning News, 12 July 1948.

the delegation's support to a southern states' rights candidate.[14]

On July 13, the second day of the convention, the intense animosity many southern Democrats felt toward the party's national leaders and the northern urban coalition began to coalesce as liberal factions tried to deny the South an effective voice in the proceedings. The first attempt was a minority report from the credentials committee seeking to deprive the Mississippi delegation of their seats. The Mississippians were accused of coming to Philadelphia with the intention of disrupting the gathering by walking out if Truman or any other anti-states' rights candidate was nominated. Although this effort was vetoed by a voice vote, it was significant that many states with large urban populations tried for several minutes to get their support for the measure recorded.[15]

The second effort came after Wright Morrow offered a resolution for the restoration of the two-thirds rule. Intense protests followed the Texan's remarks as speakers from northern state delegations angrily denounced the

---

[14]Minutes, Second Caucus of Texas Delegation to Democratic National Convention, 12 July 1948, Miscellaneous Files-1948, Folder "Politics-National," Rayburn Papers.

[15]E. Edgar Brown, ed. and comp., Democracy at Work: The Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1948 (Philadelphia: Local Democratic Political Committee of Pennsylvania, 1948), pp. 92-108.

proposal as an attempt at reinstituting minority rule. Morrow's resolution was overwhelmingly defeated as non-southerners successfully prevailed in limiting the South's participation in effecting party decisions.[16]

The third demonstration of liberal hostility to the conservatives came on July 14. In an apparent effort to mollify the South, the platform committee offered the convention a generally innocuous plank on civil rights. It stated that minorities "must have the right to live, the right to work, the right to vote, the full and equal protection of the laws, on a basis of equality with all citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution."[17] Southerners disagreed with the inclusion of such a resolution in the platform and desired to substitute instead an amendment that would reaffirm the party's traditional belief in states' rights. To that end, former Texas governor Dan Moody addressed the convention.[18] The liberals, however, led by Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota, challenged the southern resolution and the original platform committee recommendation. Humphrey rebuked the party for procrastinating on civil rights, submitted a proposal of his own, and then electrified the audience when he exclaimed "that

---

[16]Ibid., pp. 109-117.

[17]Ibid., p. 175.

[18]Ibid., pp. 178-185.

the time has arrived in America for the Democratic party to get out of the shadow of states' rights and walk forthrightly into the bright sunshine of human rights."[19] When the vote was finally taken, the Moody resolution was decisively defeated. The Humphrey proposal, urging Congress to support Truman's commitment to protective legislation for Negroes, won by a narrow margin and became the platform plank on civil rights.[20] Consequently, the destiny of southern dissidents and their relationship with the national party was no longer in doubt.

As the roll call for presidential nominations began later that night, the Alabama and Mississippi delegations announced that "we cannot with honor further participate in the proceedings of this Convention," and walked out.[21] The Texas delegation, however, remained in their seats. They had pledged themselves to support a southern states' rights candidate, not a walk out. Therefore, they stayed in the convention and gave their support to Senator Richard Russell of Georgia. Russell's candidacy, however, was promoted only as a protest, and in the ensuing balloting he lost overwhelmingly to President Truman.[22]

---

[19]Ibid., pp. 181-82, 192.

[20]Ibid., p. 210.

[21]Ibid., pp. 228-29.

[22]Dallas Morning News, 15 July 1948.

The results at Philadelphia were generally what Lone Star insurgents expected. The northern urban-liberal coalition had uncompromisingly controlled the convention and Truman had been endorsed (although not by acclamation). The attempt to reinstate the two-thirds rule had been quashed, states' rights had been ridiculed, and civil rights had been appended to the platform as a new tenet of party philosophy. The outcome of the convention left little doubt as to where the road led for disenchanted southerners. Consequently, a number of Texas dissidents headed for Birmingham, Alabama, and the conference of States' Rights Democrats "to evaluate alternatives and select a response to the challenge posed by the actions of the Democratic national convention."[23]

The situation facing southern Democrats who assembled in Birmingham was complicated and uncertain. The central problem was whether they should propose a slate of southern states' rights candidates to oppose President Truman and Alben Barkley, the vice-presidential nominee, or maintain their original strategy of selecting unpledged electors free to vote their conscience in November. Most of the leaders seemed to favor the former plan. This presented

---

[23]Nowlin Randolph to Jack White, 15 July 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Nowlin Randolph Papers, Residence, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Randolph Papers); Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," p. 153.

a problem, however, in that there were few prominent southerners at the meeting. Thus, the available list of potential nominees was quite short.[24]

The second, and perhaps most pressing problem, was the question of legitimacy. The representatives who gathered at Birmingham came from more than eleven states of the old Confederacy. Only those from Mississippi and Alabama, however, were members of their state's legally elected Democratic delegations. All others who attended, including those from Texas, had no official state party sanction. Realizing this, but hoping to maintain as much prestige for their meeting as possible, the States' Rights leaders made every effort to publicize the gathering as a "conference" and not a "convention." Any individuals who might be named to challenge Truman were not to be considered "nominated candidates," but "recommended alternatives."[25]

In an overflow crowd of more than 6,000 enthusiastic southerners at Birmingham's Municipal Auditorium, twenty-three Texas insurgents took their assigned seats as the conference of States' Rights Democrats convened on July 17. The morning session was spent listening to several speakers harangue President Truman and his civil rights program.

---

[24]Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," p. 153.

[25]Ibid., p. 168.

One such orator was Lloyd Price of Fort Worth. Recognized for his scholarly legal abilities and effective public speaking, Price, using words replete with racial overtones, blamed the country's racial problems on northerners. Price was not the only speaker to employ such rhetoric during the conference, but he nevertheless exemplified a baser element of the movement which, until Birmingham, had generally been avoided.[26]

As the morning session drew to a close, an informal steering committee completed a task it had initiated the night before. After carefully considering the options facing the States' Rights movement, the group decided to ask the assembled "delegates" to offer southern voters an alternative to Truman in the November election. This would consist primarily of campaigning locally and getting electors pledged to States' Rights candidates placed on the fall ballot. Subsequent deliberation within the rebel hierarchy resulted in the preference of Governors J. Strom Thurmond and Fielding L. Wright to serve as the movement's contenders for president and vice-president. All that remained was selling the plan to the conference.[27]

---

[26] Houston Post, 18 July 1948; J. Barton Starr, "Birmingham and the 'Dixiecrat' Convention of 1948," Alabama Historical Quarterly 32 (Spring and Summer, 1970): 38-39.

[27] Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," pp. 160-62.

By the afternoon session most of those in attendance had learned of the decisions they would entertain later in the day. Following a short welcoming address from James Folsom, governor of Alabama, the resolutions committee made its report. First, it recommended the adoption of an eight-point statement of principles pledging allegiance to the Constitution and endorsing states' rights and racial segregation. The document also blasted the national Democratic party for its villainous treason in supporting the civil rights program at Philadelphia. The manifesto concluded with a call to all "loyal Americans" to join the movement to defeat President Truman and the Republican candidate Thomas E. Dewey, and thereby crush the threat of a "totalitarian police state."[28]

The formula for achieving the latter objective was the subject of the committee's second resolution. Vindication of the South, the proposal explained, would come in November if southerners could be convinced to vote for electors pledged to support persons for president and vice-president who were States' Rights Democrats, namely J. Strom Thurmond and Fielding L. Wright. The "delegates" could hardly contain themselves at the announcement, and a tumultuous demonstration ensued. Although denied the opportunity to

---

[28]Ibid., pp. 163-64; States' Rights Information and Speakers Handbook, pp. 4-5, Box 2, Folder "Speeches," Bradley Papers.

formally nominate anyone, the conference managers permitted various individuals to deliver "seconding" speeches.[29] Palmer Bradley, leader of the Texas delegation, endorsed Governor Thurmond, and in a subsequent radio interview, he poignantly expressed the sentiments of all Lone Star dissidents. "I owe nothing to the convention at Philadelphia. I am bound by no allegiance to it. I am bound only by my conscience and to the Democratic party of Texas."[30]

Early that evening, Thurmond and Wright came to the auditorium filled with thousands of excited southerners to accept the honor and responsibility delegated to them by the conference. After reiterating many of the ideas contained in the adopted statement of principles, the pair left the platform so that the managers could spend the last few minutes completing the States' Rights organization. An executive committee was created with both Palmer Bradley and Arch Rowan named as members to represent the Lone Star State. Curtis Douglass of Pampa, a distinguished attorney and political activist in the Panhandle, was chosen to direct the campaign in Texas. The steering committee was then expanded and Merritt Gibson, because of his dedication to traditional Democratic principles and his leadership in the 1944 Texas Regulars movement, was designated national

---

[29]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[30]Houston Post, 18 July 1948.

campaign director. Shortly afterwards, the conference adjourned and southern insurgents, at last, had a legitimate vehicle through which to voice their dissension and challenge the national Democratic party.[31]

In the eight weeks between Brownwood and Birmingham, the conservative wing of the Texas Democratic party moved to formalize its alliance with other disenchanted southern Democrats and to complete the metamorphosis from rhetorical protest to outright rebellion. Although defeated in their efforts to secure intraparty support from Governor Jester, Lone Star insurgents were not discouraged. Instead, they still believed that their struggle could be waged from within the party, and that if southern political power and life styles were to be preserved, then quick, decisive action was required, regardless of the indifference of the state's party leaders. Therefore, Texas dissidents, anxious to prevent what they conceived to be external interference in the region's traditional economic, social, and political interests, acted in concert with other recalcitrant southerners and launched a full-scale assault on the bastions of the national organization.

---

[31]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," p. 256; Mrs. Curtis Douglass to author, 7 November 1974; J. Strom Thurmond to author, 15 July 1975.

## CHAPTER IV

## THE SEARCH FOR LEGITIMACY, MID-JULY TO MID-SEPTEMBER, 1948

The principal goal set by States' Rights Democrats at Birmingham was to defeat President Truman and the civil rights platform. Their success depended upon their ability to capture enough electoral votes for Thurmond and Wright in the fall balloting so that the election of 1948 would be thrown into the House of Representatives. Few Dixie dissidents deluded themselves with the idea that their ticket could win the presidency outright. Nevertheless, if the election could be decided by Congress, then manipulation of political and regional alliances would allow the insurgents to secure concessions for their principles, strip the northern urban-liberal coalition of its influence, and restore the prestige of the South in national politics.

To succeed, this plan required the cooperation of every southern state's Democratic party organization. Each must pledge its presidential electors to Thurmond and Wright instead of Truman and Barkley. Such a course was lawful, recalcitrants argued, because the national Democratic party was confederate in nature. Therefore, the state parties, being virtually autonomous, could act

independently of the national organization and alter or veto any disagreeable directives or policies.[1]

Such action, however, posed a difficult problem for the Texas branch of the movement. The Brownwood convention in May bound the state's twenty-three Democratic electors to support the nominees of the party, whomever they might be. To comply with the Birmingham strategy, the allegiance of Texas' Democratic electors would have to be switched to the States' Rights ticket. Devising and implementing a legal method whereby this change might be effected became the principal activity of Lone Star insurgents during August and early September, 1948.

Amid the excitement and celebration in Birmingham, E.E. Townes had called the delegation of Texas dissidents together to consider solutions to their predicament. After considerable discussion, the group decided upon two strategies. One was to meet with the State Democratic Executive Committee on August 9 to seek authorization to place a referendum on the ballot in the August 28 run-off primary. The referendum would allow Texas Democrats to express their preference for Truman-Barkley or Thurmond-Wright as the official nominees of the Democratic party in the Lone Star State. While the referendum would not

---

[1]Dewey W. Grantham, Jr., "The South and the Reconstruction of American Politics," Journal of American History 53 (September, 1966): 230.

be binding on the Governor's convention which met in September, it nevertheless would be an accurate reflection of Democratic voter sentiment. The second strategy called upon all Texas Democrats concerned with the preservation of state sovereignty and traditional party principles to work to control the upcoming precinct and county conventions. If successful, States' Rights Democrats would dominate the fall convention and, consequently, substitute Thurmond and Wright electors for those pledged to Truman and Barkley. Though daring, the conservatives believed these plans could succeed.[2]

When the Texas insurgents returned from Alabama, they directed their attention to controlling the precinct and county conventions scheduled to convene on July 24 and July 31. Coordinating such an effort was difficult since the States' Rights Democrats lacked a formal organization in Texas. But assistance from local groups, such as the Southern Democratic Club which already had plans underway for capturing the Dallas County party machinery, and from individuals who wished "to see the Southland unite behind

---

[2]Dallas Morning News, 18 July 1948; Houston Post, 18 July 1948. The legal grounds upon which insurgents based this strategy was the 1944 Texas Supreme Court decision in Seay v. Latham which declared a political party a voluntary association organized for the purpose of effectuating the will of its members and having the inherent power to determine its own policies. It also declared that what one political convention had done, a subsequent convention could change. (Gibson interview.)

Thurmond and Wright," helped momentarily to offset that deficiency.[3]

The results of the July 24 precinct conventions were generally inconclusive. However, after the county conventions met a week later, the possibility that Texas States' Righters might swing the party to Thurmond and Wright appeared more feasible. An Associated Press post-convention survey of Texas' most populous counties showed thirty-five counties loyal to President Truman, eight clearly in the States' Rights column, and nine with uninstructed delegations. However, the counties with the largest voting blocs in the state convention, Harris and Dallas, and two others with considerable strength, Tarrant and Harrison, all of which were controlled by States' Righters, were not included in the tally. In each of these counties, liberal delegates had walked out in protest to conservative domination of the proceedings. They then held rump conventions, elected slates of delegates, and promised to challenge the credentials of the States' Righters at the Fort Worth convention. Despite this threat, the insurgents were comparatively optimistic. They believed if they could swing the uninstructed delegates to their cause and withstand the charges of the liberals at Fort Worth, they could

---

[3]Dallas Morning News, 23 July 1948; Hall E. Timanus to Palmer Bradley, 28 July 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

carry the state convention in September and secure Texas for Thurmond and Wright.[4]

The struggle to line up county conventions behind the Dixie Democrats was an important tactic in the strategy to capture the Texas Democracy for the southern cause. Still, the need to gain support for approving an August 28 States' Rights referendum was more crucial. Grass roots insurgents agreed with the proposition and urged party leaders to endorse it as the only "fair and democratic way to decide the issue now threatening to disrupt the Democratic party of Texas."[5] Major publications across the state also spoke out boldly and insisted that the people be given an opportunity to express themselves.[6] The climate of opinion among state party leaders, however, was not encouraging. Party Chairman Robert Calvert, for example, maintained that the State Democratic Executive Committee had no legal authority to sanction the special ballot. Despite pressure from conservatives, he remained unmoved. Governor Jester

---

[4]Dallas Morning News, 1 August 1948; Randle Taylor to Nowlin Randolph, 2 August 1948, and Randolph to Taylor, n.d., Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers; V.A. Collins to Merritt Gibson, 2 August 1948, Folder "Texas," Gibson Papers.

[5]Telegram, J. Hart Willis et. al. to Beauford Jester, 19 July 1948, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[6]Editorials, Dallas Morning News, 21 July 1948, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 22 July 1948, and Houston Post, 30 July 1948.

was likewise pressured. Palmer Bradley and Arch Rowan lunched with the governor on July 27 in an effort to gain his support for approving their referendum. Jester, like Calvert, however, refused to give in.[7]

Jester's decision to deny the States' Rights movement his support was based largely on his concept of party integrity. As head of the party in Texas, he felt obligated to maintain a united state organization regardless of his personal feelings toward the policies of the national party's nominee. He also believed it would be impolitic to deny allegiance to the party which had renominated him for another term as governor.[8] And finally, there was the question of "tampering with the electorate." Jester feared that if the referendum succeeded and the party's electors subsequently switched, many voters would go to the polls and cast their ballot for the Democratic party thinking they were voting for Truman, when in reality they would be voting for Thurmond. Regardless of what motivated Jester, it was now abundantly clear that he totally opposed the

---

[7]Clippings, Scrapbool #2, Carlton Papers; Arch Rowan to Calvert, 24 July 1948, Box 4-14/112, Folder "Referendum (County Conventions)," Jester Papers; Dallas Morning News, 28 July 1948; Houston Post, 28 July 1948.

[8]Jester to Mrs. R.P. Thompson, 12 August 1948, Box 4-14/112, Folder "Referendum (County Conventions," and Jester to Mrs. H.C. Lowry, 31 July 1948, Box 4-14/111, Folder "Correspondence 1948," Jester Papers.

insurgents' efforts to deny President Truman his position on the ballot as the legal nominee of the Democratic party.[9]

Response to Jester's refusal to help get the referendum approved was swift. The governor's office was quickly inundated with letters that disclosed a pervading concern that his action would cause the very split in the Texas Democracy that most factions were working to avoid. In addition, many newspapers around the state believed that Jester was denying Texas voters an opportunity to exercise their democratic prerogative. Encouraged by such reactions, anti-Truman Texas Democrats now turned their attention to preparing an assault on the party machinery, the State Democratic Executive Committee.[10]

The consensus of opinion among Texas States' Rights Democrats was that getting their referendum placed on the August 28 run-off primary ballot would virtually assure Strom Thurmond the state's Democratic nomination. Palmer Bradley was confident that Thurmond could then carry the Lone Star State "if the people's true views can be

---

[9]Ibid., Jester to [Democratic County Chairmen], August 1948, Box 4-14/112, Folder "Referendum (County Conventions)."

[10]A wide sampling of correspondence opposing the governor's stand may be found in Box 4-14/112, Folder "Referendum (County Conventions)," Jester Papers; for newspaper reactions see Dallas Morning News, 29 July 1948 and Houston Post, 30 July 1948.

registered."[11] But getting those sentiments recorded was another matter. The State Democratic Executive Committee was scheduled to meet in Austin on August 9. This gave the insurgents less than two weeks after their meeting with Jester to prepare a convincing presentation and to stimulate sufficient public support for their cause.

The initial task facing the dissident faction was the composition of a sound, authoritative legal brief. Lloyd Price of Fort Worth, considered by the group as an expert on Texas constitutional law, was asked to draft the petition and supporting argument. Price was also delegated responsibility for circulating the document to the state's leading lawyers for their endorsement.[12]

While Price worked out the details of the group's petition, Palmer Bradley exhorted his fellow Democrats to communicate their views to the party leaders. Prior to the county conventions, he had urged his influential friends around the state to encourage delegates to the conventions to work for a resolution requesting the Democratic Executive Committee to submit the Truman-Thurmond referendum on the August ballot. To some extent, Bradley's efforts were successful; seventeen of the state's fifty largest counties

---

[11] Bradley to Louis J. Poth, 26 July 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[12] Dallas Morning News, 2 August 1948.

adopted such a resolution.[13] The outspoken Houston attorney then continued his crusade in a state-wide radio speech in which he focused attention on the potential dangers to southern life-styles inherent in President Truman's civil rights proposals. Bradley urged his listeners to "demand that [the governor] let the people speak on this question that is life or death for our Texas way of life."[14]

Other States' Rights leaders were also hard at work. E.E. Townes, who had assumed leadership of the Texas Committee of States' Rights Democrats, used the Texas press to publicize Governor Jester's breach of trust with Lone Star Democrats.[15] In addition, Nowlin Randolph, President of The Houston Bar Association, broadcast to a state-wide audience the dangers presented by Truman's policies.[16] The combined media blitz was so effective in promulgating the plight of Texas and the South that, on August 8, the Dallas Morning News editorialized:

---

[13]See Bradley to Thomas Afflect, Jr., 28 July 1948, Bradley to Hall Timanus, 29 July 1948, and Bradley to Fred Dibble, 30 July 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[14]Radio Address, 4 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Speeches," Bradley Papers.

[15]Samples of Townes's ad are found in the Dallas Morning News, Houston Post, and Fort Worth Star-Telegram, 5 August 1948.

[16]Radio Address, 6 August 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

> . . . fear far more than anything else lies behind the unwillingness of the Truman faction in Texas to permit an August primary expression by Texas Democrats. . . . If the encumbant is really the choice of the majority, what have they to fear?[17]

On August 9, the State Democratic Executive Committee met in Austin to hear arguments from the conservative wing of the party for their presidential preference referendum. Lloyd Price and Austin attorney Joe Hill represented the anti-Trumanites and spoke in favor of submitting the referendum. The committee, they said, had an obligation to insure that the voice of Texas Democrats was not strangled, but clearly heard by state party leaders. Price contended that the proposed referendum was not only legal, "but utterly apt and appropriate for the settlement of the controversy that has torn the Democratic party in Texas in twain."[18]

For more than two hours an intense debate ensued as Jerome Sneed, Jr., of Austin and District Judge Clyde Smith of Woodville spoke against approving the special referendum. Through the long afternoon both sides expressed unswerving loyalty to the Democratic party while strongly criticizing President Truman and his policies. Nevertheless, the party

---

[17]Dallas Morning News, 8 August 1948.

[18]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; copy, Petition and Argument, 9 August 1948, Folder "Texas," Gibson Papers.

leaders, in spite of Lloyd Price's forensic brilliance, were not prepared to surrender to the dictates of what they considered to be a minority faction. By an overwhelming margin of 42 to 18 the party loyalists refused to place the referendum on the August 28 run-off primary ballot. With this vote, the efforts of Texas States' Righters to keep their struggle within the party were, for the most part, doomed.[19]

The conservative wing of the Texas Democracy, although dismayed at the Executive Committee's decision, had little time to contemplate its full significance. Shortly after the Birmingham conference, States' Rights strategists, under Merritt Gibson's direction, had designated August 11 as the date to launch their national campaign. After careful study they chose Houston as the convention site and the Lone Star branch of the movement as host. Texas was considered to be "the key state in the States' Righters' efforts to dominate the South's representation in the electoral college."[20]

In a stuffy Sam Houston Memorial Coliseum, amidst blaring bands, rebel yells, and exuberant flag-waving, the national gathering of States' Rights enthusiasts commenced

---

[19] Houston Post, 10 August 1948; clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[20] Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Ness, "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948," p. 198.

on the evening of August 11. An audience of about 10,000 partisan southerners representing fourteen southern and border states were in attendance to witness Strom Thurmond Fielding Wright formally accept the presidential and vice-presidential nominations of the Democratic parties of South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama. The executive committees of these three states had removed Truman's name from their party ballots and were now ready to officially endorse Thurmond and Wright.[21]

After brief nominating and seconding speeches, the States' Rights candidates were escorted to the platform to address the audience. Governor Wright's speech centered on the historical importance of home rule. He also offered an explanation of how the national party leaders, in an effort to attract minority votes, abandoned the traditional principles of the party. Both nominees were highly critical of the influence of the urban-liberal coalition in the councils of the party. However, Governor Thurmond's remarks dealt at length with President Truman's civil rights proposals. In addition, he denounced the national government's attempt to usurp the states' rights to handle local problems.[22]

---

[21] Dallas Morning News, 12 August 1948; Garson, The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, p. 284.

[22] Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Thurmond and Wright's speeches are contained in the States' Rights Information and Speakers Handbook, Box 2, Folder "Speeches," Bradley Papers.

As Governor Thurmond finished, a contagious enthusiasm quickly swept the coliseum. In typical southern fashion, a multitude of Confederate flags filled the air as steaming delegates snake-danced, churned, and paraded through the jam-packed aisles, marching to the strains of "Dixie".[23]

Texas leaders of the movement, while pleased with the fervent demonstration of support, realized that the success of their cause required more than just zeal. Achievement of southern goals necessitated a sound, state-wide organization to plan and execute campaign strategy. Anticipating this need and hoping to profit from the enthusiasm generated by the Houston convention, a meeting of Lone Star dissidents convened early on August 12. Guided by Roy Sanderford of Belton, about two hundred insurgents began making plans that would finally give the Texas States' Rights movement direction and purpose.[24]

Because the State Executive Committee had withheld consent for the Truman-Thurmond referendum, the most promising tactic left to the conservatives seemed to be to capture control of the party at the September convention and reverse the proceedings of the May convention, just as the party liberals had done to the Texas Regulars in 1944. Such a job, however, would not be easy without capable, dedicated

---

[23]Houston Post, 12 August 1948.

[24]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

leadership. Also, it was rumored that Governor Jester, using a loyalty pledge, might try to steal the Fort Worth convention away from those county delegations legitimately controlled by States' Rights Democrats. Should Jester succeed, the States' Righters would have to campaign outside the mantle of the party as independents. This prospect held little appeal for the movement's leaders.[25] Therefore, at the suggestion of Robert W. Milner, Jr., of Houston, the group created an advisory committee to organize the campaign and map strategy for controlling the September convention. Placing Palmer Bradley in charge of the committee, the organization officially adopted the name "States' Rights Democrats." Bradley's committee subsequently convened for a short meeting and announced the selection of Bowlen Bond, a former state legislator and the District Attorney of Freestone County, as state campaign director. That the campaign would be a hard-knuckled contest there was little doubt, and as the group adjourned they were admonished to do their best to keep their fight "on a high plane to attract all classes of people in all sections on the issue of preservation of constitutional government and individual rights."[26]

---

[25]Dallas Morning News, 13 August 1948; Arch Rowan to E.E. Townes and Palmer Bradley, 10 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[26]Houston Post, 13 August 1948; Rowan interview; Dallas Morning News, 13 August 1948.

The Houston national convention of States' Rights Democrats did much to awaken the unconcerned to the alleged efforts of President Truman to subvert constitutional government. In addition, when the news was broadcast that the Truman-Thurmond referendum had been denied approval for the August primary, many Texans became anxious that Governor Thurmond's name appear on the November ballot, even if it had to be as a third party.[27] When Palmer Bradley received confirmation that party leaders would disqualify any county delegation to the fall convention that refused to support Truman as the party's nominee, he quickly set the advisory committee in motion. First, state headquarters was set up in Houston and a convention command post was established in Fort Worth. Plans were then made to bring Strom Thurmond to Dallas the week preceding the state convention for a speaking engagement.[28]

As Bradley coordinated activities in Houston, Bowlen Bond joined Arch Rowan in Fort Worth. Their job was to supervise other advisory committee members in lining up uninstructed county delegations to support the States' Rights representatives at the September convention. The

---

[27]R.A. Kilpatrick to Bradley, 14 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[28]Randle Taylor to Bradley, 17 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; Dallas Morning News, 19 August 1948.

reports which came into Fort Worth and eventually to Houston, however, were not encouraging. Curtis Douglass, reporting from Pampa, had little hope that much support from the Panhandle would be forthcoming. Persons seeking political office on the Democratic ticket headed too many uninstructed delegations in this area and did not want to jeopardize their position by supporting the States' Rights Democrats.[29] Much the same news came from Southwest Texas. In all probability, Bradley reported, counties in this region would remain loyal to Truman. Even Bowlen Bond could not offer much encouragement. The Democratic loyalists, he confessed, would probably control the Fort Worth meeting. Then, he added, they could "put us in the light of bolting the convention when the pledge to support Truman-Barkley is put to us."[30]

The prospect of anti-Truman Democrats controlling the fall convention continued to dim in late August. Consequently, States' Rights strategists began to give serious consideration to the idea of creating a third party. Arch Rowan told E.E. Townes and Bradley that "we should be prepared to protect our cause if we are disfranchised by the

---

[29]Bradley to W.B. Bates, 21 August 1948, and Curtis Douglass to Bowlen Bond, 23 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[30]Bradley to Douglass, 25 August 1948, and Bond to Bradley, 24 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

September convention."[31] Curtis Douglass and Lloyd Price agreed with Rowan's assessment and suggested the organization take immediate action to insure Thurmond and Wright a spot on the November ballot.[32]

The national office of the movement at Jackson, Mississippi, carefully monitored the problems that the beleaguered Texans were having in getting the official Democratic party endorsement for Thurmond and Wright. Considering the close delegate count, the troublesome threat of a loyalty pledge, and a public opinion poll showing Dewey leading in Texas, Merritt Gibson wrote Bradley urging him to commence plans for the creation of a States' Rights party. Bradley, although not wanting to see their fight carried on outside the auspices of the Texas Democratic party, soon realized that circumstances were leading his faction in that direction. By late August, he admitted reluctantly that such a move seemed inevitable.[33]

On August 28, Bradley traveled to Birmingham, Alabama, to attend a meeting of the national States' Rights Executive

---

[31]Rowan to Townes and Bradley, 10 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[32]Douglass to Bond, 23 August 1948, and Price to Bradley and Townes, 26 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[33]Gibson to Bradley, 25 and 27 August 1948, Bradley to Douglass, 25 August 1948, and Bradley to R.H. McLeod, 25 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

Committee. While in Birmingham, the Houston attorney spent considerable time conferring with Gibson. During their discussions, the two men outlined plans for organizing the Texas States' Rights party. They critically evaluated the situation in the Lone Star State, and they discussed a suitable date and location for holding the States' Rights meeting. They also decided to call the Texas leaders of the movement together to appraise these arrangements and issue the call for a state convention.[34]

On August 31, members of the Texas States' Rights Advisory Committee gathered in Houston to consider the campaign strategy Gibson and Bradley had devised at Birmingham. However, while Bradley was out of the state, three Texas counties, Harris, Harrison, and Brazoria, on their own initiative, had included the Truman-Thurmond referendum in the run-off primary. In each case, the States' Rights candidate had won by a margin of better than 2-to-1. Although the prevailing sentiment at the meeting was to adopt the Gibson-Bradley plan for a separate political party, the success of the August 28 referendum could not be ignored. Many committee members believed that the momentum which the referendum victory generated might be enough to

---

[34]Gibson suggested this agenda to Bradley prior to their meeting in Birmingham. Gibson to Bradley, 25 and 27 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

swing the pendulum in their direction at the September convention. As a result, the group designed a dual strategy.[35]

The advisory committee believed that the most urgent need was to insure that Thurmond's name appeared on the November ballot. Since the deadline for certifying the names of party nominees to the Secretary of State was September 17, just three days following the state convention, it was decided that a separate political party had to be created before the Democrats convened at Fort Worth. The decision to create the new party was not a loss of faith in the plan to control the September convention but rather it was insurance in case that strategy failed. Therefore, one group of States' Righters would continue to pursue the original goal of controlling the state meeting while the other made arrangements to legitimize their movement as a third party.[36]

Soon after the advisory committee meeting, Bradley issued the call for a state convention. He announced that the gathering would be held at Dallas' Fair Park Auditorium the afternoon of September 8. It would be open "to all citizens of Texas who believed in individual freedom, local

---

[35]Dallas Morning News, 29 August 1948; Houston Post, 1 September 1948.

[36]Houston Post, 1 September 1948; Dallas Morning News, 2 September 1948; Bradley to Douglass, 25 August 1948, and Randle Taylor to Bradley, 1 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

self-government, and the other rights guaranteed by the Constitution."[37]

The week preceding the scheduled gathering of Texas States' Rights Democrats was a whirlwind of activity at the organization's Houston headquarters. Priorities centered on preparing for the Dallas convention and on organizing a campaign tour through Texas for Governor Thurmond. Palmer Bradley took charge of the convention preparations while Nowlin Randolph and Robert W. Milner planned Thurmond's speaking tour.[38]

At mid-afternoon on September 7, Governor Thurmond's private plane touched down at Dallas Love Field. After a few brief remarks to a sizeable partisan crowd, the South Carolinian departed for radio station KLIF to make a scheduled broadcast. In his thirty minute talk, Thurmond cited the imminent dangers Americans faced if either Truman, Dewey, or Wallace were elected in November. He also hit hard at the South's loss of power in the councils of the party and accused the urban-liberal coalition of defering to Northern minorities. Although portions of his remarks were embarassingly demagogic, the emphasis was on the subterfuge implicit in Truman's civil rights proposals which,

---

[37]Call for Convention, Box 2, Folder "Miscellaneous," Bradley Papers.

[38]Dallas Morning News, 5 and 7 September 1948.

Thurmond implied, were a cover-up to usurp authority and centralize government control in Washington.[39]

It is doubtful that Governor Thurmond's radio address did much to encourage attendance at the subsequent meeting of States' Rights Democrats in Dallas. Nevertheless, a respectable crowd of 300 supporters assembled in Fair Park Auditorium on September 8. Although minimal, representatives were present from every section of the state. In marked contrast to other gatherings of States' Righters, the Dallas meeting was held without fanfare or display. Instead, the assemblage avoided the spectacle typical of most conventions, and organized itself in a businesslike manner.[40]

Palmer Bradley called the meeting to order and gave the keynote address. In his remarks, the Houston leader told the group they constituted "the real Democrats of Texas," and that they were called to Dallas to insure the voters an opportunity in November to vote for Governor Strom Thurmond. At the conclusion of his oration, Bradley guided the convention through the election of Dallas attorney Marion Church as permanent chairman and John Crim, Jr., of

---

[39]Dallas Morning News, 8 September 1948; radio address, Thurmond, Dallas, Texas, 7 September 1948, Folder "Speeches 1948 States' Rights Campaign," Gibson Papers.

[40]Undelivered speech, Curtis Douglass, Marshall, Texas, 7 May 1949, Curtis Douglass Papers, Residence, Pampa, Texas (hereafter cited as Douglass Papers).

Kilgore as secretary. Bradley then recommended that the convention formally organize as the "States' Rights Party," designate twenty-three presidential electors, and nominate candidates for President and Vice-President. He then stepped from the platform to help coordinate the remaining business.[41]

The convention committees worked diligently throughout the afternoon, carefully following Bradley's suggestions to insure that any and all proposed actions would be legal in the eyes of Texas state law. Curtis Douglass and Bowlen Bond were selected as chairman and secretary, respectively, of the party's Executive Committee, and twenty-three anti-Trumanites who had not attended the Brownwood convention in May were named as presidential electors. Finally, an eight-point declaration of principles in line with the precepts of individual liberty and states' rights won unanimous approval as the party platform. At the conclusion of the committee reports, Governors Thurmond and Wright were nominated and proclaimed the candidates of the Texas States' Rights party.[42]

That evening, "[a] crowd several times larger than the afternoon group" congregated in Fair Part Auditorium to

---

[41] Dallas Morning News, 9 September 1948; clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[42] Ibid. The strategy in selecting presidential electors was devised to avoid possible litigation.

witness Strom Thurmond accept the nomination. Although there was little that was new in his speech, Thurmond's message was received with enthusiasm, especially when he departed from his prepared remarks to chide the Truman-Jester faction in the Texas Democracy for insisting on blind party loyalty. "The only loyal Democrats were those loyal to principles and those who stand firm against government by self-styled specialists in Washington," the South Carolina governor asserted. The gathering assured Thurmond by their response that they would "stand firm to support his cause."[43]

Immediately following the convention, steps were taken to certify Thurmond and Wright to the Secretary of State as the party's candidates. A document explaining the creation of the States' Rights party, listing the presidential electors, and declaring Thurmond and Wright as candidates was prepared and notarized. Palmer Bradley then retained possession of the document until it could be determined whether it would be needed.[44]

The following day, September 9, Governor Thurmond left Dallas for a two-day tour of West Texas. In Lubbock, he addressed a crowd of 1,500 at an open-air meeting arranged

---

[43]Dallas Morning News, 9 September 1948.

[44]Copy, Candidate Certification, Folder "States' Rights Miscellaneous," Carlton Papers.

by the South Plains States' Rights Democratic organization. After hitting hard at the Northern wing of the Democratic party for its treatment of the South and alerting the audience to the dangers inherent in his opponents' policies, Thurmond carefully clarified the objectives of his party. Basically a justification for his party's existence, Thurmond's Lubbock speech was most noteworthy for its moderate tone. Its appeal to intellectual reasoning rather than emotional reaction was a significant departure from his earlier campaign statements made in Houston and Dallas.[45]

The doctrine of states' rights versus a centralized government continued to be the theme of Thurmond's speeches throughout his tour. Everywhere he went the size of the crowds and their enthusiasm was encouraging. By the time he left West Texas, Thurmond was genuinely pleased with the experience and optimistic at his prospects for carrying the Lone Star State in November.[46]

Governor Thurmond returned to South Carolina just before Texas Democrats gathered in Fort Worth for the state convention. On the weekend of September 11 and 12, the credentials committee assembled to hear testimony from rival delegations representing Dallas, Harris, Harrison,

---

[45] Lubbock Avalanche-Journal, 9 and 10 September 1948.

[46] Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Thurmond to Nowlin Randolph, 13 September 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

and Tarrant Counties. After serious deliberation, the committee subsequently recommended that the convention seat the contested States' Rights delegations. Upon hearing this, the pro-Truman forces promised to take the issue to the floor of the convention. The States' Righters, on the other hand, having won the first round, gained confidence that their cause might yet triumph.[47]

On September 14, the convention convened under the stern hand of Party Chairman Robert Calvert in Fort Worth's Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium. Almost at once settlement of the liberal-conservative feud became the major issue. After Calvert called the session to order, Bryon Skelton, a party loyalist from Temple, challenged the right of the Harris County delegation to remain in the convention. Immediately a storm of protest erupted from anti-Truman delegations throughout the hall who knew that the removal of the Houstonians, the largest group in attendance, would be the first step toward purging other States' Rights delegations. As order was restored, Skelton continued his indictment of the representatives from Harris County, claiming they were a "political cancer," and that it was the responsibility of loyal Democrats "to cut out this malignancy now and keep it out forever."[48]

---

[47]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

[48]Dallas Morning News, 15 September 1948.

Boos and bellows cascaded throughout the auditorium as several speakers followed Skelton to offer their advice on his motion to remove the Harris County group from the certified list of county delegations. Joe Hill, a former state senator, took the microphone to speak for the conservatives, but because of his rabid racist remarks and wild platform antics, he probably did more to denigrate the States' Rights cause than help it. In rebuttal, Tom Tyson, a pro-Truman delegate from Corsicana, told the seething crowd there was only one issue which needed consideration: whether "we shall keep within the fraternity of this party those who are attempting to cripple its leadership."[49]

For better than an hour, speeches and demonstrations continued. Finally, Calvert entertained a motion to vote on Skelton's recommendation. After denying the Harris County delegation the right to vote on its own qualifications, a time-consuming roll call was made and Skelton's proposal was adopted by a considerable margin. A goodwill gesture to allow the delegation to take a loyalty pledge and remain in the convention also failed substantially.[50]

The conservatives' hopes of controlling the meeting for the cause of states' rights had been crushed. They lost

---

[49]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers; Dallas Morning News, 15 September 1948.

[50]Clippings, Scrapbook #2, Carlton Papers.

every test vote. When it was obvious that further struggle was futile, Calvert yielded the floor to J. Hart Willis, leader of the Dallas County delegation. The assemblage, Willis contended, had "abolished the last vestiage of fair government in Texas," and had "buried the Democratic party in Texas for all time." When he announced he was leaving with Harris County, wild applause erupted as several States' Rights delegations, proudly waving Confederate flags and Thurmond-Wright banners, withdrew from the auditorium. Immediately, pro-Truman delegations which had waited anxiously outside the building throughout the imbroglio rushed in and claimed the vacated seats. The cleavage between the States' Righters and the Trumanites was now complete.[51]

In the short span of two months, much had happened to steer the Texas branch of the States' Rights movement in a direction that many had originally hoped could be avoided. The conservative faction made a deliberate and conscious attempt to maintain their struggle within the party. Men of different political principles, however, controlled the party machinery and at every turn thoroughly outmaneuvered and frustrated the States' Righters. At last, the Lone Star anti-Trumanites had been forced to assume a separate identity and complete the breach with the State Democrats they had wished to avoid.

---

[51] Dallas Morning News, 15 September 1948.

## CHAPTER V

## THE CAMPAIGN OF INERTIA: FALL, 1948

The outcome of the Fort Worth State convention created a critical situation for recalcitrant Texas Democrats. The strategy to capture the party machinery by controlling the fall convention had been fundamentally sound. However, it had hindered the creation of an efficient, well-organized state-wide effort to promote the candidacies of J. Strom Thurmond and Fielding L. Wright. It had also fostered internal dissension. If they were to have a chance to carry Texas in November, Lone Star conservatives would have to exert themselves to overcome these obstacles and make a unified, concentrated effort to perfect the local organization and redeem the time lost. The remaining six weeks of the autumn campaign severely tested their determination to succeed.

At first, the ouster of the anti-Trumanites looked as though it might backfire on the regular Democrats and attract new supporters to the Thurmond ticket. "Obviously when the delegates overwhelmingly elected by one county can be excluded by those elected overwhelmingly by a group of other counties," the Dallas Morning News editorialized, "there is no democratic process worth the name." In like

manner, the Houston Post called the convention "a demonstration unworthy of real Texas democracy." Palmer Bradley was optimistic about what the results of the convention might mean for the eventual success of the movement. "People all over the State," he wrote to Merritt Gibson, "are very sore about the disenfranchisement of the voters" at Fort Worth. Even Governor Thurmond was encouraged by what he heard. "From what I can learn of the situation," he said, "the sentiment of the people out there will be with us rather than with Truman."[1]

In an effort to prevent a loss of any more time, and seeking to capitalize on the apparently widespread public reaction, Palmer Bradley summoned top party leaders to Houston to completely restructure the campaign organization. On September 20, it was decided to recast the campaign committee due to the increased responsibilities which most of the original members had assumed at the Dallas convention. Named to the new committee were Irene Davis of Houston, Curtis Dall of San Antonio, and Horace Blalock of Marshall. Arch Rowan was designated chairman and state campaign director. The meeting also confirmed the appointment of Glenn McCarthy, a Houston attorney, as

---

[1]Dallas Morning News, 16 September 1948; Houston Post, 17 September 1948; Bradley to Gibson, 17 September 1948, and Thurmond to Bradley, 20 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

finance chairman. With reorganization completed, the Texas States' Rights campaign was ready to commence.[2]

The reconstituted campaign committee, however, was beset with problems from the beginning. A major difficulty which plagued the committee's effectiveness was a serious lack of internal cohesion within the party. One group of Dallas States' Righters, for example, despairing over their chances outside the Democratic party, talked of supporting the Republican ticket. Other anti-Trumanites, incensed over their treatment by the Jester-Calvert forces at Fort Worth, wanted to challenge all state and local Democrats with a separate slate of States' Rights candidates in November. These disagreements threatened to scatter the resources of the organization, and if they continued, would be detrimental to the success of the movement. Fortunately, Lloyd Price and Palmer Bradley, working through Mary Carlton and J. Hart Willis in Dallas, persuaded dissenters of the futility of their schemes, and a degree of harmony was restored. However, other potentially divisive internal matters still existed.[3]

---

[2]Bradley to Gibson, 17 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; Curtis Douglass to John Price, 28 October 1948, Douglass Papers.

[3]Bradley to John Price, 17 September 1948, and Lloyd Price to Bradley, et al, 17 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

The chief problems overshadowing the efforts to move the campaign forward were related to questions of economics. Throughout the previous months, most of the money expended by States' Righters for trips, radio broadcasts, or political advertising had come from their own pockets. The party's leaders were embarassed that more money was not available to support a full-scale campaign. In mid-August, shortly after the Houston convention, Palmer Bradley eased his organization's financial woes somewhat by soliciting a sizeable "loan" from H.R. Cullen, a wealthy anti-New Deal Houston oilman.[4] Cullen's assistance was a welcome addition to a depleted treasury, but because many bills were outstanding, the money did not last long. To make matters worse, in mid-September, Jack Porter, a popular Houston oilman, accepted the Republican nomination for the United States Senate. "[Porter's] entry into the picture," Bradley admitted, "is going to complicate our finances no end because the oil fraternity is going to help him."[5] The group's financial situation by late September was seriously jeopardizing the movement's future.

---

[4]Cullen to Bradley, 16 and 17 August 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[5]Nowlin Randolph to Thurmond, 7 October 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers; Bradley to Gibson, 17 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

Another matter which also created dissension was the question of achieving financial stability prior to undertaking an extensive campaign. Party leaders Palmer Bradley and Arch Rowan, for example, supported the proposition that a substantial war chest had to be established before any wide-spread campaign could be launched.[6] States' Righters such as Nowlin Randolph and Lloyd Price, however, believed it was more important to put the campaign into operation and solicit money as it progressed.[7] This disagreement not only helped render the anti-Truman crusade financially impotent for the greater part of the campaign, but it subsequently contributed to a further deterioriation of the movement's unity and continuity.

Closely related to the above problem was another manifestation of internal friction that was particularly costly for the success of the movement. When Arch Rowan accepted the position of campaign director, he explained that he could not simultaneously raise funds and organize campaign activities. Therefore, he decided to first shore up the party's weak financial structure and look into creating a tighter organization later. Immediately, he

---

[6]Bradley to John Price, 17 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; Rowan to Glenn McCarthy, 23 September 1948, Douglass Papers.

[7]Randolph to Thurmond, 7 October 1948, and Price to Randolph, 27 September 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

set about soliciting contributions, but he failed to communicate his decision to anyone else in the party. As a result, when organizational activities lagged, heavy criticism poured into his office, most of it coming from other members of his campaign committee. Already sensitive to the criticism of his family and business associates, Rowan reacted sharply to this implied reprimand and resigned his position as campaign director within a week of assuming it.[8]

Rowan's resignation threw the campaign into chaos for nearly two weeks. "The campaign is not going very well," Nowlin Randolph wrote to Governor Thurmond. "There is very substantial internal dissension, and no one seems able to take charge of the situation and iron out the various differences so that the campaign can go forward." Several attempts were made to convince Rowan to resume his duties, but the most he would give the movement was his promise to help raise campaign funds.[9] Thus, the Texas States' Rights party which had existed so tenuously since mid-August seemed headed for an apparent breakdown. If such a disaster were to be averted and the movement survive, a new strategy had to be devised and the campaign once again reorganized.

---

[8]Rowan to Curtis Douglass, 24 September 1948, Douglass Papers; Irene Davis to Rowan, 26 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[9]Randolph to Thurmond, 27 September 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers; Lloyd Price to Curtis Douglass, et al, 27 September 1948, Douglass Papers.

By early October, the outlook for the States' Rights movement in Texas was not encouraging. Had it not been for the tenacity of Nowlin Randolph and Lloyd Price, the entire anti-Truman Texas crusade would probably have collapsed.

Neither Randolph nor Price wished to see the efforts of the past several months abandoned because one individual resigned. Randolph immediately informed the national headquarters of Texas' problems and requested that someone be sent to Houston "for the purpose of ironing out the local differences and getting something effective underway."[10] Strom Thurmond was understandably annoyed at the bickering, but he promised Randolph that a representative would soon be sent to "meet with our friends in Texas to see if we could get things straightened out there and on the move."[11] Meanwhile, Lloyd Price communicated with several local leaders and suggested a new strategy to resusciate their struggling movement. In as much as the local groups were in better shape than the parent state organization, Price called for the decentralization of the movement into regional headquarters. It was also important to name a new state campaign director who would act chiefly as "a sort of clearing house," rather than assume total responsibility

---

[10]Randolph to Thurmond, 27 September 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

[11]Thurmond to Randolph, 1 October 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

for managing the entire campaign. Randolph cooperated with Price in promoting this plan.[12]

Like an infectious virus, the resolve of Randolph and Price spread to other States' Righters who quickly took inventory, recovered their purpose, and decided to push on with the revised strategy. Curtis Dall and Randle Taylor in San Antonio worked diligently to prepare their Southwest Texas regional office so it could "aggressively attack the opposition in any and every manner best calculated to achieve results for the States' Rights Party."[13] In a like manner, Curtis Douglass and John Lee Smith labored to perfect their organization in the Panhandle. On September 29, Douglass made a significant radio address to keep the issues before the public while the party ironed out its problems behind the scenes.[14] Palmer Bradley was encouraged that signs of life were stirring in the organization.[15]

Nowlin Randolph and Lloyd Price were not the only ones troubled over the beleaguered condition of the movement in

---

[12]Price to Curtis Douglass, et al, 27 September 1948, Douglass Papers; Randolph to Randle Taylor, 1 October 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

[13]Dall to Price, 30 September 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[14]Bradley to Price, 5 October 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; radio speech, Douglass, Amarillo, Texas, 29 September 1948, Douglass Papers.

[15]Bradley to Price, 5 October 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

Texas. From Jackson, Mississippi, Merritt Gibson kept a watchful eye on the state and was anxious to see the situation improve. Writing to Palmer Bradley because there was no functioning state-wide campaign organization with which to communicate, he said, "The time has come when a decision must be made immediately about whether the National Headquarters is to devote further efforts toward the campaign in Texas." Concerned that no further time be lost, Gibson informed Bradley that he was sending Tom Brady to Houston to discuss plans whereby thirty-five or forty speakers from the other southern states would invade Texas in late October to further promote the States' Rights movement. The Lone Star branch of the movement would have to bear the expense of such a strategy, but, Gibson said, "if properly exploited by a public relations man, [this scheme] would give you publicity that you could not buy through either page ads or radio broadcasts." Gibson did not like having to interfere in the internal affairs of the Texas organization, but the prevailing situation left him little alternative. "Time is now so short and so valuable," he concluded, "that we feel compelled to say that unless this program is adopted immediately it will be necessary for us to devote all of our time and resources to the other states."[16]

---

[16]Gibson to Bradley, 5 October 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

After receiving Gibson's plan for sending an army of speakers into Texas, Bradley passed it on to other States' Righters and asked for their views on revitalizing the organization. The replies to his query all generally contained the same suggestion: go ahead with Gibson's proposal and have the remaining members of the state campaign committee "immediately appoint a state campaign manager and . . . other regional campaign directors."[17] Acting on this advice, Bradley telephoned Curtis Dall, Irene Davis, and Horace Blalock. The trio were unanimous in their choice, and at a press conference on October 6, they introduced Robert Milner as the party's new state campaign director. "I think that our technical troubles are over," Nowlin Randolph advised Thurmond. "[A] few of us have worked very hard in getting Mr. Milner chosen by the campaign committee and I believe that his selection is the best possible solution at this time and that it guarantees activity from now on."[18] In addition to introducing Milner, the campaign committee disclosed plans to blanket Texas with approximately forty outstanding southern speakers, beginning at a huge barbecue and fund-raising rally in Houston on October eighteenth. The tenative list of speakers included such

---

[17]Price to Bradley, 6 October 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[18]Houston Post, 7 October 1948; Randolph to Thurmond, 7 October 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

notables as Governors Ben Laney of Arkansas and Sam Jones of Louisiana, former Governor Frank M. Dixon of Alabama, and United States Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi. It was also announced that Governor Wright would make four appearances in the state beginning October 21, and that Governor Thurmond would conclude his southwide campaign with a three-day speaking tour in Texas the weekend before the national election. With only one month remaining to campaign, the States' Rights movement in Texas appeared to be back on track.[19]

The two weeks following Milner's appointment were filled with a flurry of activity as Lone Star States' Righters prepared to launch Merritt Gibson's "Operation Texas." The national and state headquarters jointly shared the details of the extensive tour. Gibson and his national campaign committee tended to the problem of securing speakers, while Milner and his group worked to coordinate local efforts to arrange transportation and accomodations, and to establish itineraries.[20]

Communications rapidly crisscrossed the state as local leaders, in an unusual display of unity and determination, advised the Houston headquarters on the wisdom of particular

---

[19]Houston Post, 7 October 1948; Dallas Morning News, 7 October 1948.

[20]Gibson to Milner, 14 October 1948, Folder "Texas Speaking Engagements," Gibson Papers.

strategies for certain localities. For example, Aaron Sturgeon of Pampa urged Milner not to send speakers into the Panhandle as it was "a practical impossibility to get any character of crowd out here unless the occasion is an extraordinary one with a speaker of national reputation." Sturgeon believed the best technique to insure broader coverage in his area was to campaign hardest through local newspapers and radio broadcasts. Similar advice from elsewhere around the state helped Milner and his committee formulate what they hoped would be a sound, effective tour. By October 18, the blueprint was complete and the speaking campaign was ready to commence.[21]

A Houston rund-raising barbecue and rally was the opening salvo of a desperate all-out effort to capture Texas' twenty-three electoral votes for Thurmond and Wright. In the Sam Houston Memorial Coliseum, before an estimated crowd of 2,500 States' Rights partisans, a score of southern luminaries, and a state-wide radio audience, former Alabama Governor Frank Dixon and Arkansas Governor Ben Laney blasted President Truman and the national Democratic party and reiterated the theme of southern resistance to the intrusions of the federal government. Dixon urged Lone Star dissidents

---

[21]Sturgeon to Milner, 11 October 1948, Douglass Papers. See Folder "Texas Speaking Engagements," Gibson Papers and Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers for samples of local communications.

not to miss this opportunity to "fight for the very life of the civilization of the South." Governor Laney, in the main address of the evening, made an eloquent rebuttal to those Democrats who demanded a liberalizing of the party. "Our cause is a worthy one," Laney said. "All who participate in it have every reason to be proud of their action. It is democratic. It is American. It is right."[22]

In terms of forensic felicity, the Houston rally was most impressive. The politicians and dignitaries demonstrated repeatedly their rhetorical skills while imparting their message. In terms of raising money, the mass meeting was also successful. Over $7,000 was contributed which was enough to pay the expenses of the subsequent speaking tour. Whether it had gained support for the States' Rights Democratic movement, however, remained to be seen.[23]

For the next ten days, the legion of distinguished southern orators swarmed over Texas spreading the gospel of states' rights. Resident county leaders accompanied each speaker while local personnel were allowed to make speeches to support or reinforce those of their out-of-state guests.[24]

---

[22] Houston Post, 19 October 1948.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Suggestions to Texas Speakers, Folder "Texas," Gibson Papers.

The response to this intrastate campaign, although not overwhelming, was heartening. "People are showing a great deal of interest," William Hughes of Texarkana wrote to Merritt Gibson. "Present campaign is taking holt [sic] of public mind." Curtis Dall informed Nowlin Randolph that Governor Laney's meeting in San Antonio was "very good." As a result, he was optimistic about Governor Thurmond's planned appearance. "The reports that I get over the State are very encouraging," E.E. Townes remarked just one week before the national election. Even in West Texas, where only a few speakers ventured, John Lee Smith could report that the reaction was promising.[25]

The highlight of "Operation Texas" was the appearance in the state of Governors Thurmond and Wright. Both men were scheduled for intensive three-day tours during the waning days of the campaign. Governor Wright flew into Houston on October 21, and Palmer Bradley chauffeured him to Columbus where he addressed a five-county rally. While at Columbus, Wright rapped the so-called loyalist faction for their failure to support the principles of their fore-fathers, and then lashed out at the newly adopted policies

---

[25]Hughes to Gibson, 20 October 1948, Folder "Texas Speaking Engagements," Gibson Papers; Dall to Randolph, 22 October 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers; Townes to Oscar McCracken, 26 October 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers; Smith to Gibson, 29 October 1948, Folder "Texas," Gibson Papers.

of the national Democratic party. "The Democratic party has no more right to throw states' rights out the window and put the F.E.P.C. in its place than has a Christian church the right to throw out the Bible and put the writings of an atheist in its place," Wright insisted. The Mississippi governor then took his message to Plainview and Lubbock on October 22, and then to Wichita Falls on October twenty-third, where he arrived with a head cold. Despite his illness and fever, Wright urged a crowd of 125 persons "not to vote for Truman because of a feeling for loyalty to the Democratic Party." Instead, he suggested that devout Democrats should find themselves supporting the States' Rights ticket as the only available expression of true Jeffersonian and Jacksonian ideals.[26]

The climax of the States' Rights campaign in the Lone Star State was the arrival of Governor Thurmond in East Texas to address a tri-state rally at Texarkana the evening of October 27. The meeting, which was the culmination of a three-day tour through Arkansas and Louisiana and the start of a similar swing through Texas, was well-attended and enthusiastic. In his speech which was broadcast statewide, Thurmond declared that Truman and Dewey had carried their parties "down the road toward centralization of power" and the usurpation of states' rights. He asked his audience to

---

[26]Quoted in Dallas Morning News, 22, 24 October 1948.

help him with their votes to "restore the Democratic party as a bulwark" against that trend.[27]

The next morning Thurmond began a motorcade through a broad expanse of North Texas. After a breakfast meeting in Clarksville, the States' Rights candidate moved on to Paris, Bonham, Sherman, Gainesville, Denton, and later arrived in Fort Worth. This section of the state contained a great many disenchanted Democrats who were leaning toward Dewey as a protest vote. The strategy for this area then was to equate the New York governor with President Truman, and to explain that the only real alternative for dissatisfied Democrats was to support the States' Rights ticket. Speaking to several hundred people at each stop, Thurmond warned that Dewey threatened to violate states' rights as much as President Truman, and that a vote for either would virtually insure the South a further loss of political power and prestige from which the region would find it hard to recover.[28]

The following day Thurmond's motorcade toured the eastern edge of Central Texas, an area of the state which had demonstrated strong party loyalty. On this leg of the tour, the South Carolinian made President Truman his main target. Every audience heard him claim that "it is not the

---

[27]Quoted in Houston Post, 28 October 1948.

[28]Dallas Morning News, 29 October 1948.

States' righters but Harry Truman and his gang that have bolted the Democratic party." Traveling from Cleburne to Hillsboro, Waco, Temple, Georgetown, and then to Austin, Thurmond challenged his listeners to carefully scrutinize the Democratic party platform upon which Truman was nominated and see if it contained the principles which had made the party great. In addition, Thurmond hammered away at the civil rights program which the President advocated, claiming it was an unmistakable attempt "to impose the will of a central government over matters which should be under state control."[29]

On the last day of his Texas tour, October 30, Governor Thurmond flew from an early morning meeting in San Antonio to Longview, Kilgore, Lufkin, Tyler, and later that night to Houston because fog prevented his appearance in Beaumont. Throughout the day, East Texas audiences heard Thurmond recite a well-worn, familiar theme. "All we ask," he said, "is that [northerners] keep their hands off the South and let us run our affairs our own way."[30] Stumping through that region of the state which had most consistently supported the States' Rights movement, Thurmond repeatedly referred to the Republican and Democrat's civil rights program as "the most drastic usurpation of your

---

[29]Quoted in ibid., 30 October 1948.

[30]Quoted in ibid., 31 October 1948.

right of local government ever attempted in this country." He warned his audiences that "once you yield these rights to a centralized government in Washington, you will never again be able to guide and develop your state according to the needs and best interests of your people."[31]

Early Sunday morning, October 31, Governor Thurmond departed Houston for his home in Columbus, South Carolina. There he was scheduled to make a southwide radio broadcast to conclude his campaign for the presidency. Although the situation he left in Texas was still in doubt, local States' Rights leaders expected a good showing. In particular, Robert Milner, who had accompanied Thurmond during his tour and observed the situation firsthand, noted with confidence the candidate's chances. "The States' Rights party has been encouraged by Mr. Thurmond's tour. It has a better than even chance of carrying some of the large North Texas counties." Other counties around the state, he added, "are predicting easy wins." "This election," Milner declared, "may finish the one-party system in the Lone Star State."[32]

Whether Milner's prediction was correct remained to be seen. Nevertheless, as election day approached, dissident Democrats around the state could take solace in the knowledge that they had done the best they could considering the

---

[31]Quoted in Houston Post, 31 October 1948.

[32]Ibid.

circumstances. Since being denied the opportunity to keep their struggle within the party in mid-September, the anti-Trumanites had fought desperately against many hardships to keep their movement afloat and to swing Texas into the States' Rights column. Their success in overcoming their problems would be measured on November 2. Until then there was little to do but await the final verdict.

## CHAPTER VI

## NOVEMBER JUDGMENT

"In view of the election returns from Texas, it is with considerable trepidation that I write to you at all. We made such a frightfully poor showing that I have the greatest reluctance to even think about it." With these words to Strom Thurmond written the day following the national election, Nowlin Randolph expressed the general sentiment of those who had worked assiduously to champion the cause of states' rights in the Lone Star State.[1] The pollsters had misjudged Truman's defeat on the national level, but they were correct in predicting his victory in Texas, much to the chagrin of the States' Rights leaders. Thurmond polled only 9.3 percent of the state's popular vote; Truman had received an overwhelming 66.3 percent; and Dewey had received a surprisingly high 24.4 percent. Understanding why their loss had been so great confounded the anti-administration conservatives and became the focus of speculation for the next few weeks.[2]

---

[1]Randolph to Thurmond, 3 November 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers.

[2]Alexander Heard and Donald S. Strong, Southern Primaries and Elections, 1920-1949 (Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1950), p. 186.

Contemporary analyses of the inability of the States' Righters to capture Texas' twenty-three electoral votes fell into a few, well-defined categories. Several leaders, such as Merritt Gibson and Palmer Bradley, believed there had been insufficient time available to establish any significant opposition and that their "limited resources . . . proved an insurmountable obstacle" to the success of the movement.[3] Nowlin Randolph, E.E. Townes, and others thought that a "lack of cooperative organization" was the principal reason for the group's poor showing. Further, they blamed the Republicans for destroying "whatever chances the States' Rights Party had." It was the GOP, they asserted, that scared "thousands of anti-Truman Democrats who would have voted the States' Rights ticket," back into the Democratic ranks.[4]

Limited time, inadequate funds, a weak organization, and the villainous Republican party undoubtedly shared some responsibility for crushing the States' Rights Democratic movement in Texas. But Palmer Bradley's reasoning that party loyalty affected the outcome of this election was the

---

[3]Bradley to J.F. Dabney, 10 November 1948, and Gibson to Bradley, 4 November 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

[4]Randolph to Thurmond, 3 November 1948, Folder "Dixiecrats," Randolph Papers; Townes to Gibson, 15 December 1948, and Townes to Peter Molyneaux, 8 November 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

most accurate assessment. "We have taught our people for eighty-five years that it is practically against the law to vote anything but the Democratic ticket," he wrote to Thurmond after the election, "and we can't expect to break this tradition over night."[5] Texans voted for Dewey because he was the candidate of the Republican party and for Truman because he was the candidate of the Democratic party. They would have voted for any candidate the party had nominated, regardless of character or principle, because they were convinced that their party was right; Texans were party regulars. The strength of this element in the election of 1948 was the largest single factor contributing to the results.

In the November balloting, Governor Thurmond successfully carried South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana; these were the only states where he appeared as the official nominee of the Democratic party. The remaining states in Dixie went for President Truman. The results of the election clearly reveal how well the dissidents understood the importance of capturing the party label for their party's candidates Thurmond and Wright. The situation in Texas was no exception. For months Lone Star States' Righters had struggled to keep their fight within the

---

[5]Bradley to Thurmond, 16 November 1948, Box 2, Folder "Correspondence," Bradley Papers.

Democratic party, considering their most important priority the support of the governor and the state party machinery. But the axiom of party loyalty was inextricably woven into every facet of political life in Texas. Consequently, Beauford Jester refused to contribute to the insurgency of recalcitrant Texas Democrats. The governor believed it was more productive to seek change within the existing party structure than to pursue a principle through a third party movement. He preferred to fight the battle for states' rights as a Democrat. This decision, dictated by loyalty to the party, prevented the anti-Trumanites from effectively controlling the Democratic state organization and produced monumental obstacles for the States' Rights Democratic campaign in the Lone Star State.

The overwhelming object of dissident Texas Democrats was to preserve the rights of states as guaranteed by the Constitution and to prevent the further centralization of government power in Washington and the extension of federal authority into the private lives of ordinary people. To achieve this goal, they found it necessary to forsake the Democratic party and to join in the crusade for States' Rights. Lone Star insurgents, however, had tremendous problems to overcome before they could hope to succeed. They had to win over and weld together an electorate with strong party attachments, not an easy task. Old loyalties

were difficult to break down. Leading anti-Trumanites tried to do this by pointing out that the Democratic party had repudiated the principles upon which it was founded. Moreover, they claimed that the party had nominated a candidate who had abandoned traditional party principles in exchange for the votes of northern minorities. In such a situation party loyalty was misplaced loyalty. In the final analysis, however, they were unable to give voters sufficient incentive to renounce the Democratic party and support an independent. Even though they focused their attention on Truman's civil rights proposals as a threat to constitutional government, States' Righters could not induce significant numbers of Lone Star Democrats to betray their political allegiance. Party loyalty triumphed over a deficient campaign.

The States' Rights Democratic movement in Texas fell short of throwing the presidential election into the House of Representatives. However, the movement was not without its achievements. It demonstrated that some Texans could follow an independent course when a principle was involved and that organized resistance was an acceptable approach to threatened changes in the political, economic, and social status quo. In fact, the conservative, anti-administration force's campaign in 1948 was a critical step toward emancipating Texas from the yoke of the one-party system in

presidential elections. Subsequent election returns reveal considerable party realignment in the Lone Star State. In the seven presidential elections since 1948, three have been won by Republicans. Dwight D. Eisenhower captured Texas in 1952 and again in 1956. Richard Nixon carried the state in 1972. Statistically, in 1960, Nixon missed winning Texas by less than 50,000 votes. In all probability, according to Merritt Gibson, he would have carried the state in 1968, when Hubert Humphrey won by less than 40,000 votes, had George Wallace not polled half a million votes. After the election of 1948, presidential candidates, regardless of party, never again took Texas' vote for granted.[6]

The course which Lone Star States' Righters traversed from early February 1948, when Truman announced his plan to seek civil rights legislation, was an odyssey filled with adversity and challenge at every turn. Texas conservatives, distrustful of government centralization and strongly opposed to Washington's increasing intrusion into a state's right to handle its own problems, eventually organized in a formal effort to reduce that power. In one sense, the movement was the culmination of a decade of political unrest; in another, it was the onset of a political reformation.

---

[6]Texas Almanac (Dallas: A.H. Belo Corp., 1977), p. 540; Gibson interview.

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Primary Sources

### Manuscripts

Bradley, Palmer. Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas.

Bradley, Robert L. Letters to author, 20 August and 6 November 1974.

Carlton, Mrs. F.R. Residence, Dallas, Texas.

Douglass, Curtis. Residence, Pampa, Texas.

Douglass, Mrs. Curtis. Letter to author, 7 November 1974.

Gibson, Merritt H. Letter to author, 25 November 1974.

Gibson, Merritt H. Residence, Longview, Texas.

Jester, Beauford H. Texas State Library and Archives, Austin, Texas.

Randolph, Nowlin. Residence, Houston, Texas.

Rayburn, Sam. Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas.

Sanderford, Roy. Residence, Temple, Texas.

Thurmond, J. Strom. Letter to author, 15 July 1975.

### Newspapers

Dallas Morning News

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

Houston Post

Lubbock Avalanche-Journal

New York Times

## Interviews with the Author

Bradley, Robert L. Houston, Texas. August, 1974.

Carlton, Mrs. F.R. Dallas, Texas. August, 1974.

Gibson, Merritt H. Longview, Texas. July, 1974.

Odeneal, W. Clyde. Dallas, Texas. August, 1974.

Randolph, Mrs. Nowlin. Austin, Texas. September, 1974.

Rowan, Arch H. Fort Worth, Texas. July, 1974.

## Secondary Sources

### Books

Brown, E. Edgar, ed. Democracy at Work: The Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, 1948. Philadelphia: Local Democratic Political Committee of Pennsylvania, 1948.

Burns, James MacGregor. Roosevelt: The Lion and the Fox. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1956.

Garson, Robert A. The Democratic Party and the Politics of Sectionalism, 1941-1948. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974.

Hamby, Alonzo L. Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism. New York: Columbia University Press, 1973.

Heard, Alexander, and Strong, Donald S. Southern Primaries and Elections, 1920-1949. Montgomery: University of Alabama Press, 1950.

McKay, Seth Shepard. Texas Politics, 1906-1944. Lubbock: Texas Tech Press, 1952.

Parmet, Herbert S. The Democrats: The Years After FDR. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1976.

Pass, Fred, ed. Texas Almanac. Dallas: A.H. Belo, Corp., 1977.

## Articles

Grantham, Dewey W., Jr. "The South and the Reconstruction of American Politics." Journal of American History 53 (September, 1966): 227-246.

Sitkoff, Harvard. "Harry Truman and the Election of 1948: The Coming of Age of Civil Rights in American Politics." Journal of Southern History 37 (November, 1971): 597-616.

Starr, J. Barton. "Birmingham and the 'Dixiecrat' Convention of 1948." Alabama Historical Quarterly 32 (Spring and Summer, 1970): 23-50.

## Unpublished Studies

Brophy, William J. "Origins of the Southern Conservative Revolt, 1932-1940." Master's thesis, North Texas State University, 1963.

Kuhlmann, Mary Ellen. "A Comparison of Texas and National Public Opinion from August, 1946 Through August, 1948." Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1949.

Ness, Gary Clifford. "The States' Rights Democratic Movement of 1948." Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1972.

Tolleson, William Jean. "The Rift in the Texas Democratic Party--1944." Master's thesis, University of Texas, 1953.