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KENTUCKY'S 1935 GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION

By

Olivia M. Frederick
A.B., University of Louisville, 1965

A Thesis
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University of Louisville
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August 1967

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A Thesis Approved on

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ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with the events and issues which were connected with the 1935 gubernatorial election. There is first a brief sketch of Kentucky politics prior to the 1935 election. Particular interest is given to the history of the Democratic Party and the split which occurred in it at the turn of the century.

A great deal of attention is given to the factional struggles which occurred in the period between 1931 and 1935. The controversy and drive for a primary law is discussed in detail.

Because of the nature of the primary law enacted in 1935 two primary elections were held before the Democratic Party selected its candidates. The candidates, issues and significance of each primary is discussed. Also included is an analysis of the vote given to the candidates in both parties.

In a like manner, the campaigns of the two gubernatorial nominees are discussed. The significance of the results of the election and the factors which were responsible for its outcome are presented.

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CHAPTER I

PRELUDE TO DISHARMONY

It was cold and rainy across most of Kentucky as voters went to the polls in 1935 to register their choice for the state's next governor. Despite the inclement weather a large number of voters turned out, thus climaxing one of the bitterest political contests in the history of the Commonwealth. Few topics intrigue Kentuckians as much as the question of who will be victorious at the next election. However, most controversy is concentrated in the weeks just prior to the primary and general election. But in 1935 voters were subjected to over ten months of almost constant political fighting and campaigning. Within less than a year, a special session of the state legislature had been called under dramatic circumstances and three elections had occurred. Before the events of 1935 can be understood, a brief look must be taken at Kentucky's political history.

Before the Civil War political power had been largely vested in the hands of Whig slaveholders. Much of the Whig Party's strength in the state had been concentrated in the Central Bluegrass region. Not only was the area predominantly Whig, but it was from this region that most of the Party's leaders came. Other areas of Whig strength were found in the Eastern Mountain and Pennyroyal regions of

the state.

Although the Whig Party, under the leadership of Henry Clay, successfully controlled the state in this period, the Democratic Party was not without support among Kentucky voters. The extreme western corner of the state, commonly called the Jackson Purchase area, was overwhelmingly Democratic. There were also pockets of Democratic strength in Northern Kentucky along the Ohio River and in a few Southeastern counties, notably Pike, Carter and Morgan.

The death of Whig leader Henry Clay, the intensifying of the slavery issue and finally the Civil War all produced "the necessary solvent to destroy well-fixed political habits."¹ After the War Between the States most of the old slaveholding Whigs joined the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party then became an alliance between the small farmers of western and central Kentucky and the Bluegrass "Bourbons". During the Civil War and in the years immediately after the Republican Party attracted little support in the state. It was at first considered by most to be a radical party. After the war the Reconstruction policies of the Republican Party made the party even more unpopular in the state. But gradually, as the bitterness engendered by the conflict faded the Republican Party gradually united the mountain Whigs, the emancipated Negroes and some old Jacksonian Democrats. However, the Republican coalition

¹Jasper B. Shannon and Ruth McQuown, Presidential Politics in Kentucky, 1824-1948 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1950), p. 38.

presented little threat to the powerful Democratic alliance. The only hope for a Republican victory lay in a split among Democratic forces. Such a split did not occur for almost thirty years. The Democratic coalition was a powerful combination which managed to maintain its ascendancy until 1895.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century Kentucky, like much of the nation, was beset by political and social unrest. This was the period when the Populist movement was growing and giving expression to the discontent of farmers across the South and West. Kentucky as an agricultural state had suffered from the severe decline in farm prices. The frustration and discontent of farmers with the economic situation had been demonstrated in 1891 when the Populist candidate for governor of the state had polled over twenty-five thousand votes.² "This widespread suffering among farmers was to have great repercussions in Kentucky politics for a number of years."³

By 1891 the Democratic Party in the state was becoming divided over the silver question. In that year conservative Democrats successfully opposed the nomination of P. Wat Hardin "who they thought was tainted not with Populism, but with too much leaning to isms, chief among

²Judge Charles Kerr (ed.), History of Kentucky (Chicago: The American Historical Society, 1922), II, 1006.

³Shannon and McQuown, Presidential Politics, p. 64.

which was free silver."⁴ Supported by conservative Democrats, John Y. Brown received the nomination and was subsequently elected governor.

Very early in his administration, Governor Brown and his Secretary of State broke with the other members of his administration. There followed three years of bitter factional fighting in the state legislature. In the intervening time between the 1891 and 1895 gubernatorial elections, economic conditions in the state had become worse as a result of the financial panic of 1893. As the panic deepened into a depression the heralds of the free coinage of silver and adoption of bi-metalism preached a doctrine which found increasingly receptive ears. Though few people understood it, the silver versus gold debate dominated the 1895 gubernatorial election.

In 1895, Hardin once again sought the nomination, but this time he ran openly on a free silver platform. Although conservative Democrats opposed Hardin again, they were unable to defeat him. However, they did succeed in having adopted a gold standard platform for him to run on.⁵ Still, the opposition to Hardin was great and many of the more conservative party members refused to support him. The result was that for the first time in the history of the state the Republican Party won a gubernatorial election.

⁴George Lee Willis, Kentucky Democracy (Louisville: Democratic Historical Society, 1935), II, p. 303.

⁵Ibid., p. 304.

An even greater defection within the Democratic Party occurred the following year in the presidential election. The Great Commoner, William Jennings Bryan, had tremendous appeal for small farmers across most of the state. Their grievances were many and of long standing. The farmers had been hardest hit by the depression. They had also been provoked by the discriminatory practices of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad and by the resentment against what they regarded as "Bourbon" or Bluegrass domination of the Democratic Party. To many of these people the issue of free silver served as a banner for more than the improvement of their economic conditions. It also became the rallying point for those who were dissatisfied with the political order. For these very reasons, Bryan antagonized and alienated urban dwellers and the descendants of the old Whig slaveholders. Enough Democrats were fearful of Bryan's seeming radicalism to give Kentucky's electoral vote for the first time to a Republican candidate for President.

In 1896 a majority of Kentucky's Democrats were supporters of the Cross of Gold candidate. However, many of the party's most influential leaders were opposed to Bryan. For the most part these leaders were from the growing urban areas and from the wealthy Bluegrass region. They included men such as Henry Watterson, publisher of the Courier-Journal, John Y. Brown, and Simon Bolivar Buckner.

The division between the "gold" and "silver" factions

in Kentucky's Democratic Party persisted well into the present century. The debate over monetary policy quickly faded as a divisive issue, but the split continued. After 1896, the silver faction became the dominant group in the party, while many of those who opposed Bryan combined to form the non-ruling faction. But gradually many of the influential leaders who had opposed Bryan became associated with the dominant faction. Although some individuals maintained steadfastly their allegiance to one faction, many persons moved repeatedly from one side to the other in search of politically greener pastures. Despite this, one faction had managed by a variety of means to maintain its control of the party and state government since 1896. The dissident faction of the party came to be increasingly composed of young men whose political ambitions had been thwarted and by men who had become for some reason, alienated from the ruling group. By 1935 this combination of politicians "on the make" and alienated political veterans was large enough and powerful enough to defeat what had been the dominant faction of the Democratic Party for over forty years. Before this political accord was fashioned, however, a great deal of political wrangling had transpired.

In the period after the election of 1896, "there was born a coalition of political leaders who were identified with the Bourbons, and which was known as the Bi-Partisan Combine."⁶ As the title "Bi-Partisan" indicates, this

⁶John E. Fenton, Politics in the Border State (New Orleans: The Hauser Press, 1957), p. 46.

coalition was composed of both Democrats and Republicans, all of whom espoused a belief in non-partisan government. Theoretically, a non-partisan government was one which was conducted solely for the well-being of the populace. The decisions and actions of its leaders would not be based on considerations of party politics. The leaders of the bi-partisan coalition contended that non-partisan government could be achieved simply by having leaders from both parties in important positions in the state government. In reality it did not provide either a more efficient or more democratic government. Instead it provided one faction of the Democratic Party with the means of maintaining its dominance and provided the Republican Party with an opportunity to exercise political power in a state that was predominantly Democratic. In practice, the Bi-Partisan government proved non-political only in that it mattered little to its leaders whether the Republican or Democratic Party emerged victorious at the polls. More important than party affiliation was the candidate's willingness to follow the guidance of the Combine's leaders who were concerned solely with perpetuating their own power.

The political strength of this group developed slowly after the turn of the century. By 1915, when the Bi-Partisan Combine embarked upon twelve years of uninterrupted rule, the most powerful political leaders in the state operated within its ranks. Among its members were Democrats such as Billy Klair, an influential Lexington

politician, and Herb Smith of Harlan, and Republicans such as Morris Calvin of Lexington. These men were "area bosses" who wielded great power within their respective domains and were capable of assuring a large vote to any candidate supported by the bi-partisan coalition. Most of these people were urban politicians. Acting in concert, Democratic and Republican leaders had learned "that by effective use of the concentrated and malleable urban voting populace they could effect a victory for either side in a close election, and all elections were close during this period of Kentucky's political history."⁷ This group's control was maintained through the election of governors and state legislators who were willing to submit to the direction of the Combine's leaders. If the Democratic nominee proved uncooperative, as was the case in 1927, the Combine's leaders merely gave their support to the Republican candidate.

But the principal means through which the Combine exerted its influence was the Highway Department. Because of the increasing demand for new and better roads after World War I, the Highway Department became a center of new wealth and power. Its power derived not only from the huge sums of money involved in the building and maintenance of roads, but also from its allocation of patronage. Furthermore, the authority of the highway commissioners to determine the routes of the various roads provided them

⁷Ibid., pp. 46-47.

with a means of influencing the legislature and local governing bodies.⁸ During the period that the state government was under the control of the bi-partisan group, the Highway Commission was composed of four members, two from each of the major political parties. The equal division of party members on the Commission supposedly assured efficient and honest management. But in practice, most of the highway commissioners became representatives of the area bosses or an important bi-partisan leader and "were a unit in promoting their own selfish interests and the interests of their Democratic and Republican supporters."⁹

With this type of organizational support the bi-partisan combine was able to maintain its control for almost fifteen years. But in 1927 friction developed within the coalition which resulted in its dissolution. Republicans were largely responsible for the difficulties which developed. They proved less non-partisan than their Democratic counterparts and attempted to exercise a disproportionate amount of power. In so doing they alienated the Democratic members of the bi-partisan coalition.

The conflict developed because of a political feud between Ben Johnson and J. C. W. Beckham, two of Kentucky's most prominent Democratic politicians. Feuds of a

⁸J. B. Shannon and others, Political Behavior in Kentucky 1930-1940 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1943), p. 8.

⁹Orval W. Baylor, J. Ian Talbot: Champion of Good Government (Louisville: Kentucky Printing Corporation, 1942), p. 83.

political nature were not uncommon in the state's history but few equaled the Johnson-Beckham feud either in longevity or intensity. The antecedents of the feud can be found in what were originally the Ben Hardin and Charles Wickliff factions of the Democratic Party. The struggles between these two Nelson county groups had begun in the 1840's and the rivalry had continued until Ben Johnson inherited from his father the leadership of the Hardin faction, and Beckham in the tradition of his grandfather Charles A. Wickliff, became standardbearer for the House of Wickliff.

Both Ben Johnson and J. C. W. Beckham had begun their political careers during the 1890's. Both men at some point in their careers had been aligned with each of the two factions of the Democratic Party and thus exemplify the confusing nature of Kentucky politics prior to the 1935 gubernatorial election.

Johnson started his career as a member of the House of Representatives in Frankfort in 1885. "He immediately became an important figure in that body and two years later, . . . was elected speaker of the House."¹⁰ In 1906, he was elected to the Congress of the United States where he served until March 4, 1927.¹¹ After his retirement from Congress, Johnson was appointed to the important position of chairman of the Highway Commission. This position was

¹⁰Lexington Herald, December 2, 1934, clipping from Thomas R. Underwood Collection, Margaret King Library, University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹¹Ibid.

offered to him because the Combine at that time was engaged in an election campaign against Beckham. It was hoped that Johnson could assist in securing his defeat.

Beckham had also enjoyed an active political life. He had, as a young politician, assumed the office of governor after the assassination of Governor William Goebel in 1900. Before assuming the governor's chair Beckham had been aligned with the "silver" faction. It was during his administration that many of those who had opposed Bryan reasserted their influence in the party. After leaving the state capitol he broke his old association with the dominant faction.

It was during this period that Beckham formed his close friendship with Percy Haly of Frankfort. Haly's career also dated back to the 1890's. Although he had served only in minor positions, such as railroad commissioner, he had acquired a great deal of power within the Party. This power and influence he would use in 1935, and in so doing would be instrumental in defeating the opposing faction.

For a number of years after leaving Frankfort, Beckham served as United States Senator. Defeated in the 1921 election, he returned to Kentucky and formed a law partnership with Elwood Hamilton, an influential Louisville Democrat.¹² Urged by Haly, reformist groups, and others

¹²Interview with Clay Wade Bailey, June 6, 1966. Bailey was in 1935 Frankfort correspondent for the Courier-Journal and is now Frankfort correspondent for the Cincinnati Enquirer. Hereafter cited as Interview with Bailey, III.

opposed to the bi-partisan coalition, Beckham entered the 1927 Democratic gubernatorial primary.

This was not the first attempt by a candidate to defeat the coalition. In 1923, a little known politician from Western Kentucky, Alben Barkley, had unsuccessfully opposed the Combine's candidate for the Democratic nomination. Unlike Barkley, Beckham was able to defeat the dominant faction's candidate in the Democratic primary and thus secured the gubernatorial nomination. The bi-partisan coalition then rallied behind the Republican candidate, Flem Sampson. Although Beckham presented the Combine with its most formidable challenge, he suffered defeat in the general election. Thus, control of the government by the Combine seemed assured for another four years. But few things are as uncertain as Kentucky politics and within two years the Republican-Democratic alliance had been destroyed.

In payment for assistance given in the 1927 campaign, Governor Sampson retained Ben Johnson as chairman of the Highway Commission. Disagreements soon developed between Johnson and Sampson as both sought to dominate the Highway Commission. In February, 1929, Johnson resigned from the Commission and began actively working to destroy the Sampson Administration. He was soon joined in his efforts by other Democratic members of the coalition, such as Billy Klair and Allie Young of Morehead, who had also clashed with Sampson. The bi-partisan coalition found itself threatened even more when Democrats of the dissident wing

of the party joined the Johnson group.

The first clash between the Sampson Administration and the Democrats occurred in the 1930 elections. There followed, in the 1931 session of the General Assembly, a struggle between the two groups over the passage of a bill which placed the control of the highway department in the hands of the Democrats. Under the provisions of this bill, appointments and removals on the Highway Commission would be made by the lieutenant governor and the attorney general subject to the approval of the state Senate. Both the lieutenant governor and attorney general were Democrats allied with Johnson and thus the measure was clearly designed to take from Sampson his greatest source of money and power. The passage of this so-called "Ripper Bill" by a Democratic majority in the state legislature meant the final destruction of bi-partisan control.

The disharmony provoked in 1927 by the factional fighting in the Democratic primary and the disruption of the bi-partisan coalition served to convince Johnson and other Democratic leaders that the 1931 gubernatorial nomination would have to be made in a manner which bespoke amity and concord. Hoping to avoid the type of intra-party fighting which frequently characterized many Democratic primaries, many party members advocated the use of a convention to select the party's nominee. These men also undoubtedly believed that through a convention they could secure the nomination of candidates favorable to themselves

and thus perpetuate their own power. Accordingly, they quietly began early in 1931 to gather support for the convention method of nomination.

However, this proposal did not receive the endorsement of all Kentucky Democrats. Before the Democratic Party made its final decision as to a convention or primary election two meetings of the party's Executive Committee were held. In addition, the constitutionality of the state's election laws were contested in the state's courts. Much of the opposition to the convention came from the powerful Democratic paper, The Courier-Journal. Opposition to the convention system was not strong enough in 1931 to prevent its adoption but in many ways it foreshadowed the type of controversy which developed in 1935.

The Democratic convention of 1931 selected as its gubernatorial nominee, Ruby Laffoon of Madisonville. Laffoon's nomination was secured primarily through the efforts of Ben Johnson and his son-in-law, Lan Talbot.¹³ The gubernatorial nomination was made without much controversy, but a heated struggle developed when the delegates to the convention sought a running-mate for Laffoon. Johnson and Talbot supported Albert B. Chandler of Versailles, Kentucky, for the nomination. On the other hand, Laffoon and his followers, principally Thomas S. Rhea, opposed Chandler's nomination. Laffoon opposed Chandler publicly on the grounds that he was too young and

¹³Baylor, Talbot, p. 147.

inexperienced. Possibly a more important factor was that Chandler had been associated with the minority faction of the party, while Laffoon was identified with the dominant faction. Nevertheless, the Johnson-Young-Talbot will prevailed and Chandler received the nomination. During the campaign differences between Laffoon and Chandler were submerged and a united ticket was presented to the voters. But the wounds inflicted in the selection of Chandler never healed. Instead they became the first blows in some of the most intense fighting in the party's history.

The ballots of the 1931 election had hardly been tabulated and Laffoon installed as governor before the ill-will generated in the nominating convention reappeared, paving the way for an even more hotly contested battle over nominating methods in 1935. The Democratic coalition, which had been formed during the Sampson Administration and which had skillfully managed the 1931 election, was not a manifestation of a reconciliation of Kentucky Democrats. It had been created when both factions found that they faced a common foe. Once victory had been achieved, the old animosities and ambitions reasserted themselves. The Democrats, who had united in their opposition to Sampson, were once again divided.

The disharmony which plagued the Laffoon administration was first evidenced when Laffoon called for the enactment of a three per cent sales tax. This measure, it was hoped, would help to alleviate some of the economic

problems created by the Great Depression. It was Laffoon's contention that the revenue received from the sales tax would provide the state with the necessary funds to participate in federal relief programs. The governor first proposed such a measure during the 1932 session of the state legislature, but the anti-administration forces, led by Chandler, Talbot and Allie Young, encountered little difficulty in defeating it.

In 1933, the Federal government notified Kentucky that before it could receive the benefits of the Federal Emergency Funds, the state would have to provide a required three million dollars. After conferring with Federal Relief Director, Harry Hopkins, Laffoon issued a call for a special session of the General Assembly to meet on August 15, 1933. This meeting of the legislature was to devise some means of meeting the demands made by Washington.¹⁴ When Laffoon submitted his program to the legislature, it centered around what he called "an emergency gross receipts tax."¹⁵ It was apparent to all that what Laffoon euphemistically proposed was a sales tax. The special session of the legislature lasted for more than a month, but adjourned without passage of the sales tax. Backers of Laffoon could not muster enough votes in either the House

¹⁴Lexington Herald, August 11, 1933, p. 1.

¹⁵Commonwealth of Kentucky, Journal of the Extraordinary Session of the Kentucky Senate (Frankfort: The State Journal Company), August 15, 1933, p. 17.

or Senate for the measure. The governor did succeed in passing through the House a one per cent consumer tax, but this measure was defeated in the Senate by the anti-administration forces.¹⁶

During 1932 and 1933, Laffoon, ably assisted by Thomas S. Rhea, had been steadily increasing his legislative support. Although several candidates supported by the governor had been successful at the polls, Laffoon did not directly seek enactment of the sales tax during the regular 1934 session of the General Assembly. However, he took several indirect steps toward securing its passage at a later date. In a general reorganization of the state government, Laffoon removed all significant authority from the office of lieutenant governor. This move was undoubtedly directed against Chandler, who by that time was leading the anti-administration forces in the legislature.

That Laffoon had captured control of the legislature was further demonstrated in the resolution passed shortly before its adjournment. The resolution requested the governor to call an extraordinary session of the General Assembly to act on appropriations and revenue measures.¹⁷ Laffoon, responding to this request, reconvened the legislature in May, and quickly sought the enactment of a sales

¹⁶Ibid., September 26, 1933, p. 278.

¹⁷Commonwealth of Kentucky, Journal of the Kentucky Senate, Regular 1934 Session (Frankfort: The State Journal Company), IV, March 14, 1934, p. 5451.

bill. This time he succeeded in his attempt.

The sales tax measure did not get through this session unopposed. Various other taxes were proposed as substitutes for a general sales tax. Some members of the legislature advocated a tax on tobacco, wine or beer. Others supported the taxing of cosmetics and soft drinks. A bill was introduced which would have taxed admissions to places of amusement and utilities.¹⁸ But all these measures were rejected and the sales tax adopted.

Passage of the measure proved extremely difficult. After having twice rejected the bill advocated by Laffoon, the House on June 8, 1934, passed the measure by a vote of fifty-one to forty-seven.¹⁹ In the Senate the bill faced stiffer opposition. Despite the tactics of the Chandler group, the Senate passed the sales tax bill one week later by a vote of twenty to seventeen.²⁰ An indication of the relative strength of the two factions in the legislature is seen in the fact that the sales tax passed both houses with a one vote majority.

It is not the purpose of this discussion to determine the reasons for Laffoon's advocacy of the sales tax or to

¹⁸Commonwealth of Kentucky, Journal of the House of Representatives, Extraordinary Session 1934 (Frankfort: The State Journal Company), pp. 412, 391, 428, 419.

¹⁹House Journal, June 8, 1934, pp. 492-93.

²⁰Commonwealth of Kentucky, Journal of the Extraordinary Session of the Kentucky Senate (Frankfort: The State Journal Company), June 15, 1934, p. 287.

ascertain whether the measure was necessary to meet the financial needs of the state. What is significant for a study dealing with the 1935 gubernatorial election, is the fact that the sales tax proved to be one of the most unpopular forms of taxation in the state's history. When the sales tax was enacted it appeared that Laffoon had achieved a major victory over his political enemies. While he had defeated the Chandler forces in the 1934 encounters, he had at the same time unknowingly provided them with a campaign issue in the sales tax. This issue would become a crucial element in the outcome of the 1935 election. Laffoon, in signing the sales tax bill, had remarked: "In six months time this will be the most popular law ever enacted in Kentucky."²¹ Contrary to the governor's expectations the tax became extremely unpopular, and A. B. Chandler, the man who had opposed it for three years, would be pitted against the Laffoon supported candidate in the 1935 Democratic primary. Commenting on the passage of the sales tax, Wallace Embry, a prophet much wiser than Laffoon, said: "It was a good fight over a trail of broken promises. The taxpayers will be waiting at the polls in the next election. It's just partly over."²²

Laffoon found opposition not only in the legislature, but also in the highway department. After assuming the

²¹Courier-Journal, June 16, 1934, p. 1.

²²Baylor, Talbot, p. 271.

office of governor, Laffoon had reinstated Johnson as chairman of the Highway Commission. It will be recalled that it was Johnson who had been most responsible for Laffoon's nomination in 1931, and for a few months the two politicians appeared to work harmoniously together.

Criticizing this relationship, one newspaper stated:

"Omnipotence sits enthroned on Johnson's deskHe is keeper of the State's Conscience, Chancellor of Road Exchequer, Lord High Executioner, office boy and mail clerk."²³

It was not long before differences between the two men began to appear. Conflict seems to have developed over the attempt of both to control the Highway Commission. During Laffoon's administration, the Commission was made up of eight members. As the differences developed, the eight quickly aligned themselves with either Johnson or Laffoon. Laffoon was, for a short period, prevented from removing those opposed to him by the bill passed during the Sampson administration which placed the authority to remove and appoint members in the hands of the lieutenant governor and attorney general. Chandler, as lieutenant governor and a leader of the anti-administration forces, refused to cooperate with Laffoon, who thus lacked the authority to remove those who aligned themselves with Johnson. One of the governor's primary objectives in the 1934 reorganization of the state

²³Lexington Herald, December 2, 1934.

government was the removal of this authority from Chandler. He achieved it in the "ouster law" which gave the governor the authority to dismiss, without explanation or hearing, any appointee in the government. As soon as the constitutionality of the "ouster law" had been upheld by the state courts, Laffoon acted. From December, 1934, to March, 1935, Johnson and his three supporters on the Commission, A. P. Plummer, Zach Justice and Charles Fernell, were all removed by Laffoon.

After his dismissal, Johnson, assisted by Ian Talbot, joined forces with the anti-administration faction. Thus, by 1935 this faction counted among its leaders, Lieutenant Governor Chandler, Allie Young, Ben Johnson and Ian Talbot, all of whom are among the craftiest politicians ever produced in the state. Eventually J. C. W. Beckham also would align himself with the anti-administration faction and thus make complete the coalition which would do battle with the Laffoon forces for control of the state government.

In the early part of the struggle the Laffoon forces seemed to enjoy an overwhelming advantage. They possessed the resources, both human and material, of the state government, and the assistance of a powerful political organization which maintained close ties with county officials. The anti-administration forces, at that time, had little financial support and only the nucleus of a state-wide political machine or organization. Confronted

by what appeared to be insurmountable disadvantages, the anti-administration group began to gather the funds needed to wage a tough political campaign. And they watched for any error on the part of the administration which would provide them with a chance to improve their own position. Laffoon provided them with such an opportunity when he decided to oppose a primary election.

CHAPTER II

PRIMARY OR CONVENTION

In the early months of 1935, both the anti-administration faction and those who aligned themselves with Governor Laffoon turned their attention to the task of securing the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Both groups were vitally interested in the method of nomination the party would use to select its nominees. Governor Laffoon and his supporters endorsed the calling of a nominating convention, convinced that they could thus control the selection of candidates.¹ Those who endorsed a convention pointed to the fact that a convention had been held in 1931 to select the party's candidate and its choice had enjoyed overwhelming success in the general election. Implicit in their argument was the idea that the convention had been a major cause of the party's victory.

The anti-administration forces realized that there would be little hope of obtaining the nomination for a member of their faction in a convention controlled by the Laffoon administration. Thus, Chandler and others advocated nominating the party's candidates in a direct

¹Interview with Clay Wade Bailey, February 21, 1966. Hereafter cited as Interview with Bailey, I.

primary. This group also had a powerful argument in the fact that the Democratic Party had traditionally used the direct primary to nominate its candidates. A brief look at the history of the primary in Kentucky will serve to explain their arguments and much of the controversy which arose in January, 1935.

The direct primary in Kentucky has had a record of gradual legal transformation. The first legislation dealing with primaries was enacted in 1880.² This early act was limited in its provisions, permitting only the most populated counties to nominate candidates for local offices in primaries.³ Following the example of many other states, Kentucky enacted a law in 1892 which made the primary applicable to the nomination of candidates for state offices. Under the provisions of this act primaries were not made compulsory but instead became optional. The authority to call a primary was vested in the "governing authority of the political parties." Although Kentucky did not lead in the direct primary movement, it did pioneer in the movement for the enrollment of party voters. "The law of 1892 provided that at the regular registration voters might make a declaration of party allegiance. It also made provision for the use of the

²Charles Edward Merriam and Louise Overacker, Primary Elections (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928), p. 17.

³Ibid.

registration lists by the political parties at the primary elections."⁴

During the next twenty years conventions and primaries were used by both political parties to choose their candidates. But with the passage of time, Democrats came to look with increasing favor upon the direct primary. Then "after the notorious convention of 1899 in which William Goebel was nominated in a long drawn out and internecine fight, . . . which ended eventually in the assassination of Goebel, the convention system became unpopular with the Democratic party."⁵

As the direct primary gained in popularity, it became increasingly apparent that the provisions of the antiquated laws would have to be revised. The 1892 law had not specified a day for the holding of primaries. It required only that if a primary was called that it be held at least forty days before the general election, and that public notice be given of the primary. As a result of the inadequacies of the old law the political parties often held their primaries on different days, and frequently with only a minimum of public attention being drawn to the fact that a primary was scheduled. These "snap primaries," caused confusion and resentment among voters.

The most important reason for the increased popularity

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵Shannon and others, Political Behavior in Kentucky, p. 9.

of the direct primary was the odious image which the convention system gradually acquired. The contentious manner in which conventions were often conducted and the scandalous stories of corruption and political bargaining which circulated after each convention convinced many people that the system would have to be discarded. In addition to this criticism, there was growing during this period an ever mounting belief that the "people" should have the determining voice in the nomination of their candidates. Consequently, the direct primary came to be viewed as a more democratic method of nomination.

As a result of these factors, Kentucky, like many other states during the Progressive Era, enacted a new law in 1912 which made primary elections mandatory for the nomination of all candidates for state offices. This new act also corrected the worst abuses of the earlier legislation by assigning one day, the first Saturday in August of each year, for the holding of primary elections.⁶ Furthermore, under the provisions of the new law there would be no conventions, and it would not be possible for "snap primaries" to occur; both political parties would select their candidates on the same day throughout the state.

Despite the general acclaim which the 1912 law received, in less than a decade the direct primary had

⁶John D. Carroll (ed.), The Kentucky Laws, Statutes (Louisville: The Baldwin Law Book Company, 1918), III, 312.

once again come under critical attack in Kentucky and across the nation. Although repeal of the direct primary was given serious consideration in many states, only in a few was such a measure actually enacted.⁷ One of these states was Kentucky, which in 1920 repealed the mandatory provision of the primary law, but only as it applied to nominations for state offices. Candidates for county, municipal or national offices still had to be chosen in a primary. Under the provisions of the 1920 law political parties were given the option of choosing their candidate for state offices either in a primary or a convention. The authority to choose the method of nomination was given to the governing authority of the parties.⁸

A significant factor in the repeal of the primary law was that the action was taken under a Republican administration and Republicans in Kentucky had traditionally supported the convention system. This support existed for many reasons, all of which derived basically from the fact that Republicans were in a minority in the state. Because of this, the Republican Party lacked the financial resources that the Democratic Party possessed, and primaries are, in most instances, more expensive than conventions. Furthermore, because its only hope for success at the polls lay in united opposition or in an alignment such as

⁷Merriam and Overacker, Primary Elections, p. 106.

⁸William Edward Baldwin (ed.), Carroll's Kentucky Statutes (Louisville: The Standard Printing Co., 1930), p. 831.

had existed under the bi-partisan rule, the Republicans rarely had more than one strong candidate for any single office. Fewer in number and lacking equal financial resources, the Republicans would only destroy their own party if they indulged in the type of intra-party struggles which characterized many of the Democratic primaries.

The provisions of the 1920 law worked very well for both parties for eleven years. The Republicans, in most cases, chose their candidates in conventions, while Democrats picked theirs in primaries. Then, in 1931, the Democrats, for the first time since 1899, nominated their candidates in a convention. The controversy which had been generated in 1931 and the division which developed within the Laffoon administration served as preliminaries for the struggle waged on behalf of the primary in 1935.

The question of how the party would nominate its gubernatorial candidate in 1935 was first raised by anti-administration leaders when they sought to pass a compulsory primary act during the 1934 session of the General Assembly. These efforts were blocked by the administration.

As the time approached for the party to choose its candidates and as the number of politicians who openly sought the nomination increased, widespread speculation was generated as to the course of action the Democratic Executive Committee would take. As the interest increased,

so did public endorsement of the direct primary. This sentiment would have remained a latent force except for the work of a very skillful and shrewd journalist.⁹

More than any other person, Howard K. Henderson, Frankfort correspondent for the Courier-Journal, was responsible for organizing and giving expression to public opposition to the convention system.¹⁰ An experienced observer of Kentucky politics, Henderson combined a keen intelligence with a zealous devotion to honest and efficient government. Few politicians or administrations escaped his crusading scrutiny. He "exposed numerous scandals during his term at Frankfort and incurred the bitter enmity of politicians who were his victims."¹¹ "Ruthless" in many ways, he was undaunted by the attacks of his enemies. And he possessed, in the circulation of the Courier-Journal, an influential and powerful means of communicating his findings to the public.

In the latter part of 1934, Henderson began to urge the calling of a primary in his column, "From the State Capitol." His efforts were supported by the Courier-Journal and its publisher, Robert Worth Bingham. In 1935 Bingham was serving as Ambassador to Great Britain, but he had been aligned with the anti-administration wing of

⁹Interview with Bailey, III.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Mark Ethridge to Olivia Frederick, April 15, 1966, in the possession of the author.

the party for a number of years and had actively worked to improve its position in the state. Bingham was closely associated with J. C. W. Beckham and Percy Haley, both of whom were identified with the dissident faction of the Democratic Party.

The newspaper, backed by Bingham and the determined assistance of Henderson, embarked upon an intensive campaign designed to arouse public opinion in support of the primary to such proportions that it could be ignored only by those who courted defeat at the polls. Early in 1935, Henderson began canvassing counties throughout the state, asking officials and voters their preference as to a primary or convention. According to Henderson, the responses to these questions indicated overwhelming support for the primary.¹²

This canvass of public opinion preceded the state-wide poll taken by the paper early in 1935. On January 16, the Courier-Journal announced that it had mailed 250,000 ballots to Democrats and Republicans throughout the state. On these they were to indicate their preference for a primary or convention. These ballots, the paper stated, had been sent to a cross-section of men and women of different occupations and professions. The number of ballots used in the poll represented a fairly large sample of Kentucky voters. In the 1931 gubernatorial election, approximately 820,000 votes had been

¹²Courier-Journal, January 19, 1935, p. 1.

cast and a year later about 975,000 Kentuckians voted in the Presidential election. The Courier-Journal ballots thus represented more than one voter for every four who went to the polls in 1932.¹³

When the returned ballots were counted, they indicated that the majority of the people in the state favored a primary. The poll received the attention of newspapers across the entire state. One of the reasons that the poll attracted so much interest was that on the day after it was announced, a meeting of the Democratic Executive Committee was unexpectedly called and scheduled to meet before the deadline date for return of the ballots. When the call was issued for the Executive Committee meeting the Courier-Journal requested those who had received ballots to return them as quickly as possible, so that the count could be made before the committee convened.¹⁴ Obviously, the newspaper hoped that if the returns were favorable to the primary, it would convince the Committee to call a primary.

On January 27, the day before the committee met, the paper reported that participants in the poll preferred the primary by a vote of 60,207 to 5,558 — a ratio of eleven to one.¹⁵ The final tabulation of ballots in the poll was published on February 5. Of the 250,000 ballots

¹³Ibid., January 16, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁴Ibid., January 17, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁵Ibid., January 27, 1935, p. 3.

mailed, 71,583 were returned. Of these, 65,571, or 91.6%, indicated a preference for the primary. Democrats returned 47,941 ballots endorsing the primary as compared with 3,710 who favored a convention. Republicans in the state registered a vote of 17,640 for the primary and only 2,293 for the convention system.¹⁶

Although the Executive Committee disregarded the Courier-Journal poll and other evidences of public support for a primary, the poll did affect later events. It demonstrated to Lieutenant Governor Chandler that widespread support for a primary existed, and this was a factor in his decision to call a special session of the legislature for the purpose of enacting a compulsory primary law.¹⁷

It seems likely that the increasing interest evinced in a primary also influenced the actions of the administration. As the sentiment for a primary election increased, a meeting of the Democratic Executive Committee was called by the committee chairman, Bailey Wootton, to determine by what method the party would select its candidates.¹⁸ The meeting was scheduled for January 28, a date earlier than the committee customarily met and prior to the time that the results of the poll would be

¹⁶Ibid., February 5, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁷Interview with Albert B. Chandler, Lexington, Kentucky, December 6, 1965. Hereafter cited as Interview with Chandler.

¹⁸Lexington Herald, January 19, 1935, p. 1.

conclusive. In light of the action that the committee took, it seems likely that the administration hoped to act before a great deal of publicity could be given to the results of the poll. It was apparent that the efforts of the Courier-Journal to secure a primary was arousing widespread interest.

As the day neared for the meeting of the Executive Committee, the movement for a primary grew in strength. Sensing public support for the primary, James Richmond and Frederick Wallis, both announced aspirants for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, publicly endorsed the direct primary. A majority of Kentucky's congressional delegation urged their party's chief executive body to order a primary. Alben Barkley, United States Senator from Kentucky, in a letter to a committee member, endorsed the primary by declaring:

Regardless of the wishes or the interests of any candidate for any office, the right of the people to control their government, to participate in it, to demand faithful service of it, and to see that it is administered for their welfare, is a fundamental right to which all selfish ambitions must yield.²⁰

In an attempt to impress the Executive Committee with the importance of its decision, Barkley warned its members, "you may hold the destiny of the party in your own hands."²¹

²⁰The Louisville Herald Post, January 15, 1935, p. 1.

²¹Courier-Journal, January 24, 1935, p. 1.

In addition to the exhortations of prominent political figures, many of the newspapers in the state were also urging the committee to call a primary. This was particularly true of the Democratic press. Commenting on this issue, the Interior Standard said in late January:

If the desires of the candidates
are not of influence on the committee,
then the almost solid demand of the
Kentucky Democratic press . . . ought to
cause the committee to order the primary
method of making these nominations.²²

The Federal administration and the national party also manifested an interest in the decision of the committee. Kentucky was the only state holding a major election in 1935. For this reason both of the national parties sought to use a win in the state as a herald of victory in the 1936 Presidential election. On the day before the committee met Postmaster General James A. Farley, National Chairman of the Democratic Party, requested that the committee respect the wishes of the voters by calling for a primary.

The interest of the national party was also demonstrated in the unexpected trip of Senator Barkley from Washington to Frankfort to address the committee. "Politicians quickly saw behind Senator Barkley's hurried trip to Frankfort the hand of the President himself," for it was widely known in political circles that the "President and other leaders of the national administration

²²The Stanford Interior Standard, January 25, 1935, p. 1.

had sought reports on the Kentucky political situation."²³

Senator Barkley began his address to the Executive Committee by reading a letter from the President. In the presidential communication, President Roosevelt expressed "the hope that in your state, without regard to political parties, the greatest freedom and widest opportunity may be accorded to all the people for participation in the selection of candidates as well as to their final selection."²⁴ The President optimistically concluded the letter by saying:

May I indulge the hope and belief that in your state, and in all states, those who are charged with party responsibility will preserve and guarantee these indisputable rights to the people of every class.²⁵

After he had delivered Roosevelt's message, Barkley personally urged the committee to adopt the direct primary. "It is rather tragic," Barkley stated, "for a Democrat to appeal before a Democratic committee and ask it to be democratic."²⁶

When Senator Barkley concluded his speech, the committee heard an hour and a half address by Governor Laffoon. The governor defended his support of a convention by asserting that "there are times when it is best to

²³The Herald Post, January 28, 1935, p. 3.

²⁴Courier-Journal, January 29, 1935, p. 3.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Lexington Herald, January 29, 1935, p. 1.

nominate in a primary and there are times when those nominees should be chosen in a convention."²⁷ Laffoon implied that 1935 was one of those times when a convention should be used but refused to explain why it was so. The governor did say that he favored a convention "because I want to see Mr. Roosevelt renominated in 1936."²⁸ He later refused to clarify this statement. Almost one half of Governor Laffoon's message was devoted to a denunciation of the Courier-Journal. He further implied that a convention would prevent this newspaper from obtaining control of the state government.

Following Governor Laffoon's speech the members of the committee were urged by two of the gubernatorial aspirants to respond to the desires of the people and adopt a primary. After hearing these two pleas, the committee voted.

In 1935, the Democratic Executive Committee was composed of twenty-five men and twenty-five women. Two men and two women were chosen from each of the eleven congressional districts which had existed prior to 1930. In addition, six members were chosen from the state-at-large.²⁹ It is significant to note that "the governor, in effect, controlled the Executive Committee through the

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Courier-Journal, January 29, 1935, p. 1.

²⁹Ibid.

use of patronage."³⁰

In less than three hours from the time the committee had begun its meeting, the ballots had been cast and the results announced. The committee returned a vote of thirty to twenty in favor of a convention. Of the eleven congressional districts, six voted for a convention, three for a primary and two were evenly divided.³¹ The committee also decided that the nominating convention would meet at Lexington on May 14. This state-wide convention was to be preceded by county conventions where delegates to the state convention would be chosen. The county conventions were to be held on May 11.

A question that must be raised and answered is why the Executive Committee took action which opposed overwhelming public support for a primary. In so doing the committee members appeared to reject a basic principle of democratic government. By their actions they were saying that public officials did not have the duty to remain responsive to the desires of a majority of the qualified electors. For the privilege of nominating by convention, those in control of the committee willingly subjected themselves to a great deal of criticism. The reward, then, must have been considerable. It was, in fact, control of the state government for the next four years, for it was generally recognized that the Democrats would

³⁰Interview with Chandler.

³¹Courier-Journal, February 5, 1935, p. 2.

win the next election. The selection of Democratic candidates assumed for both factions a great importance. While any candidate supported by the administration would enjoy an advantage in a primary, the Laffoon forces were confident of controlling a convention. Thus, they would be in a much safer position if the choice was made by a convention.

The administration was assured of controlling a convention because of the intrinsic nature of the system. Theoretically, delegates to state conventions were chosen by party members at the county level. In practice, little interest was demonstrated in most county conventions except by those who had a vested interest, principally those who owed their livelihood to the state administration. In most cases, the selection of delegates was left to a select few who were easily guided by the administration.³² Thus, it is easy to see why the Laffoon forces placed their reliance on nomination by convention.

Reaction to the committee's decision was immediate. Newspapers from all regions of the state responded in an indignant manner. "The action of the committee," the Times Star of Covington, declared, "leaves conditions in the Democratic Party in Kentucky in a 'sorry mess,' and amounted to saying to the 'rank and file' of Democrats be damned."³³ Expressing sentiments similar to those of the

³²Interview with Chandler.

³³The Covington Times-Star, January 29, 1935, p. 1.

Times-Star, the Paducah Sun Democrat declared:

The committee hasn't left itself a leg to stand on. The majority of its members by their action have admitted, almost blatantly, that they are nothing but puppets to a machine which counts its obligations to the national party as little as it does those to real Democrats within the state. . . .³⁴

Once the committee had made its decision, some newspapers which had earlier endorsed the primary, took a conciliatory attitude, urging harmony and unity. The Interior Standard, exemplifying this declared:

The committee has spoken. While in our opinion, it did not represent either press, people or national or state leaders, other than the governor, it is now the duty of all good Democrats to turn out in mass conventions and elect the best men possible to select as delegates to the Lexington convention.³⁵

There were also papers which approved the action of the committee. However, most of these approached the decision in an apologetic manner. For instance, the Richmond Daily Register argued that "the committee made a decision which it considered to be for the best interests of the party."³⁶

Many Republicans saw in the action of the Democratic Executive Committee an opportunity to improve their own

³⁴Paducah Sun Democrat, January 29, 1935, clipping in Thomas Underwood Collection, Archives Division, Margaret King Library, University of Kentucky.

³⁵Interior Standard, February 1, 1935, p. 2.

³⁶Richmond Daily Register, January 29, 1935, p. 3.

election chances. "The horizon breaks brightly for the Republican Party in 1935, a brightness not seen for many years," the Harlan Daily Enterprise optimistically stated. The paper further urged Republicans in Kentucky to nominate their candidates by primary, and by so doing secure "the mass of votes alienated by the Democratic Executive Committee's actions."³⁷

It is extremely difficult to ascertain now the reaction of the general public to the decision of the committee. Many persons attempted to create the impression that voters were indignant over events. It is doubtful that the public was quite as aroused as the proponents of a primary contended. However, it is clearly evident that the direct primary had a great deal of popular support among Kentuckians. Many civic, business and labor organizations had publicly supported the calling of a primary. Citizens from many counties in the state had met in local groups and passed resolutions endorsing the direct primary.³⁸

The controversy over the method of nomination to be used was given ample coverage by all the major papers in the state. Few newspapers were neutral, for they could not afford to be on an issue that aroused such popular interest. Strongly worded editorials were published

³⁷Harlan Daily Enterprise, January 29, 1935, p. 2.

³⁸Courier-Journal, January 6, 1935, p. 1.

supporting both the primary and convention. But those endorsing the primary were by far the more numerous. Many papers conducted polls in their local areas in an attempt to determine public sentiment.³⁹ These polls demonstrated the popularity with which the primary was viewed.

Both factions were aware that the method of nomination chosen would be of vital importance to their future. For the administration, a primary meant possible defeat; for the anti-administration forces, it was the only chance for success. For a short time after the executive Committee meeting, it seemed that the administration had achieved victory. But the ambitions of the anti-administration faction would be promoted by public opinion. Public antipathy towards a convention and genuine support for the primary had been manifested in the actions of private and political organizations, and in the writings of journalists throughout the state. Cognizant of this support and presented with an opportunity, the anti-administration faction secured a direct primary.

II

On February 5, 1935, Governor Laffoon and Thomas S. Rhea, the administration's choice for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, left Frankfort on a journey to

³⁹Ibid., January 15, 1935, p. 2, e.g. Courier-Journal.

Washington, D. C. The announced purpose of the trip was the acquisition of Federal funds for construction of Kentucky roads and the discussion of a prison-labor problem which was confronting the state. But it was widely known that a more important reason for the trip was the concern of Governor Laffoon over his administration's relations with the national administration.⁴⁰ The committee's decision to nominate by convention was considered by many a direct affront to the Roosevelt administration and the national party. But there had also been earlier difficulties between the two administrations. During the 1934 session of the General Assembly, which, it will be recalled, was controlled by the administration, a measure to provide for state enforcement of NRA codes had been defeated. In addition, the legislature had refused to ratify the Child Labor Amendment.⁴¹ Both measures were a part of the New Deal program. There had also been problems connected with Kentucky matching the funds of the Federal relief measures. Differences had thus accumulated for a couple of years. Dissension in an election year would be intolerable for the Laffoon forces, for they needed the support of the Roosevelt administration.

But the governor faced one major problem in leaving Kentucky. It meant that Chandler, as lieutenant governor,

⁴⁰ Interview with Bailey, I.

⁴¹ Journal of the House of Representatives, 1934 Regular Session, I, 2838, 2473.

would head the state government. Although the trip would take only two days, it was feared that Chandler, as acting governor, would take some action which would be damaging to the plans of the administration. Every conceivable course of action open to Chandler was discussed by Laffoon's forces.⁴² The possibility that he might call a special session of the legislature was considered, but Laffoon was of the opinion that Chandler would not take such a step.⁴³ Not all of Laffoon's advisors agreed with his judgement. "Leslie Morris, president of the Farmers State Bank, while riding on the train with Laffoon and Rhea from Frankfort to Lexington, warned them that Chandler would probably call a special session and that it would be wisest not to leave the state."⁴⁴ However, Laffoon remained confident that Chandler would not do that.⁴⁵

And Chandler might not have called for the special session except for the exhortations of Howard Henderson. Before leaving Frankfort, Laffoon and his cohorts had agreed that Chandler would not be informed of the departure until the train had crossed the state line. However, Henderson was informed that the governor was leaving. To

⁴²Interview with Elam Huddleston, Louisville, Kentucky, June 18, 1966. Huddleston was State Treasurer during the Laffoon administration.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

check on this information, he sent Clay Wade Bailey, then a correspondent for the Courier-Journal, to the railway station to see if the governor and Rhea boarded the train for Washington.⁴⁶ When Bailey arrived at the station, the train had already departed.⁴⁷

Henderson, believing his information to be correct, phoned Gerald Griffin, the Courier-Journal's Lexington reporter, and asked him to check the train at Lexington to see if the governor was on it. After Griffin confirmed Laffoon's presence on the train, Henderson telephoned Chandler at his home in Versailles, and told him of the governor's trip.⁴⁸ At the same time, Henderson also suggested to Chandler that he call a special session of the legislature to enact a compulsory primary law. The lieutenant governor, accepting the advice of Lan Talbot and others who were at his home, at first resisted the idea of calling a special session.⁴⁹ But Henderson phoned Chandler several more times during the night in an effort to persuade him. He pointed out to Chandler that such a step would be extremely popular with voters and that only through a primary could any of his associates be

⁴⁶Interview with Clay Wade Bailey, June 1, 1966. Hereafter cited as Interview with Bailey, II.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Interview with Allan M. Trout, Frankfort, Kentucky, May 5, 1966. In 1935 Trout was correspondent for Courier-Journal. Hereafter cited as Interview with Trout.

⁴⁹Interview with Bailey, II.

nominated. These efforts continued until after 4:00 a.m., when Henderson persuaded Zach Justice, an influential Pikeville Democrat, to call Chandler and talk with him.⁵⁰ After a great deal of discussion, Chandler acceded to the idea.

Early the next morning the acting governor went to the capitol where he called Henderson. "The reporter then joined Chandler and together they planned their action. They obtained a copy of a recent Court of Appeals decision which had upheld a call for a special session and used the same phraseology that had been used in that case."⁵¹

In the proclamation calling for the special session, Chandler explained his actions by saying:

The people of the Commonwealth of Kentucky have indicated in no uncertain terms their desire to have an opportunity to select the nominees for State offices in state-wide primaries, and . . . the right of the people to have primaries is a fundamental one and ought not to be denied.⁵²

Despite Chandler's assertion that he was merely obeying "the will of the people," the reaction to the proclamation was not one of universal approval. Public reaction for the most part followed partisan lines. Some denounced Chandler's actions as dangerous and being politically motivated. "It now develops," declared the Herald Post of Louisville, "that a certain group joined in the cry for a

⁵⁰Interview with Trout.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Courier-Journal, February 7, 1935, p. 2.

primary, not for the welfare of the state, but for the purpose of grabbing control of the Democratic Party."⁵³ Even more provoked by Chandler's actions, the Lexington Herald charged:

It means a chance for "Happy" [referring to the Lieutenant Governor's nickname] to stand on his head before the grandstand . . . Kentucky has had many clown acts in her volcanic and grilling history, but for downright bumptiousness, the call of Happy (beg pardon, Governor Albert Benjamin Chandler) for a special session wins the prize.⁵⁴

Ignoring the question of motive, many individuals regarded the action of the acting governor as heroic and worthy of praise. "The thoughtful and patriotic act of Lieutenant Governor Chandler," said the Kentucky Standard, "has met with unanimous approval except with a few aspiring politicians and a bunch of jobholders under the 'thumbnail' of Governor Laffoon."⁵⁵

More important than public reaction, was the response of the administration. Governor Laffoon was in an antechamber of the United States Senate when Senator Barkley brought him word of what had occurred. He and Tom Rhea immediately made arrangements to return to Frankfort.

Most people, including the Chandler forces, expected the governor to try to revoke the proclamation calling for

⁵³Herald Post, February 7, 1935, p. 8.

⁵⁴Lexington Herald, February 7, 1935, p. 3.

⁵⁵The Bardstown Kentucky Standard, February 21, 1935, p. 2.

the special session of the General Assembly. The controversy over whether he possessed the authority to do so added to the already confusing political scene. The Constitution of Kentucky, while it confers the authority to call sessions of the General Assembly on both the governor and acting governor, provides no revoking procedure. Contending that he had the right to exercise this authority, Laffoon, upon returning to Kentucky issued a revocation proclamation. In it he stated:

The Constitution provides that the Governor may upon extraordinary occasions convene the General Assembly . . . There is no extraordinary occasion at this time necessitating the convening of the General Assembly, and there is no urgent public necessity now existing demanding the attention of the law making body for the welfare of the state.⁵⁶

The governor further justified his actions by arguing that a special session would probably have to be called in the summer to enable Kentucky to participate in Federal programs, and the expense of two special sessions would be too great a burden upon the taxpayers of the state.

In an attempt to prevent the governor from revoking Chandler's proclamation, the anti-administration leaders secured a restraining order. The controversy became very heated over the question of whether the restraining order or the revocation order had been issued first. Laffoon's train had been met at Huntington, West Virginia by the

⁵⁶Courier-Journal, February 8, 1935, p. 2.

governor's secretary, who brought with him the revocation order. The governor signed it soon after the train crossed the Kentucky-West Virginia border near Ashland. This was at about 4:10 a.m., which was clearly prior to the time the restraining order was granted. Governor Laffoon maintained that the order was official the minute he signed it. On the other hand, the Chandler forces argued that the revocation order was not official until it had been entered on the executive journal by the Secretary of State. This had not been done at the time the restraining order was issued.

While the legality of the revocation order was being brought before the state courts, Chandler met with thirty-five representatives and twelve senators on February 8, in the first meeting of the special session. Lacking a working quorum, the body adjourned until the following day.

The decision as to whether the governor possessed the power to revoke the order of the acting governor, was first brought before the Franklin Circuit Court. The administration's argument centered on an old Nebraska Court of Appeals decision, the only known legal precedent. "That Court had held that the governor was within his rights in revoking a call for a special session made in absence by an acting governor."⁵⁷

On February 11, 1935, the Franklin Circuit Court handed down its decision. The presiding judge, H. Church

⁵⁷Ibid., February 10, 1935, p. 1.

Ford, ruled that:

The executive has no implied power, after once exercising the discretion given to call the General Assembly into session to revoke that call. The proclamation by the Governor is the final act, insofar, as the Governor is concerned Any other interpretation would give to a proclamation of this character such uncertainty and instability that intolerable confusion and uncertainty would prevail.⁵⁸

In commenting on the Nebraska case, the judge said that the decision "was rendered by a divided court," and the dissenting opinion seemed to be "supported by the better authority and better reasoning."⁵⁹

Judge Ford's decision made no mention of the restraining order and its alleged violation. Nor did it say whether the executive order was official until entered on the executive journal. It merely held that the governor's power was exhausted when he issued the call and that he lacked the power to revoke it.

The following day, February 12, the Kentucky Court of Appeals, in a four to three decision, affirmed the Circuit Court's decision. Meanwhile, the administration, sensing its defeat in the state courts, turned its attention to the special legislative session. There the Laffoon forces directed their efforts towards preventing the passage of a primary bill. Hopefully, this could be accomplished by

⁵⁸Royster v. Brock; Laffoon v. Ranklin, 258 Ky. 152, 79 S.W. (2d) 707 (1935).

⁵⁹Ibid.

deadlocking the session. However, if they were unable to do that they could still seek passage of a primary bill favorable to their plans.

On February 14, a bill was introduced in the Senate, providing for the selection of candidates in one primary.⁶⁰ On the same day the administration introduced a bill which provided for run-off primaries which were common throughout the South.⁶¹ The provisions of the run-off bill provided that if one candidate did not receive a majority in the primary, the two candidates receiving the largest number of votes would then engage in a run-off election. On the other hand, the single primary bill required only that a candidate receive a plurality to receive the nomination. No second primaries would be held.

The administration's support of the run-off primary was based on the belief that through such a system the nomination of an anti-administration candidate could be prevented. In February, 1935, it seemed likely that J. C. W. Beckham would be the candidate backed by the anti-administration forces, and the administration mapped its course to meet his candidacy. In an address to the special session, Laffoon made reference to Beckham's probably candidacy when he said that he "supposed the Courier-Journal would go and get the same old horse out of

⁶⁰Commonwealth of Kentucky, Journal of Extraordinary Session of the Senate (Frankfort: State Journal Company), p. 47.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 50.

the stable and trot him around and say, 'here's the salvation of Kentucky'." ⁶² Fearful that Beckham or some other candidate might receive more votes than Rhea in a primary, the administration adopted a strategy designed to overcome this. A number of candidates or "favorite son candidates" would be induced to enter the primary, making it difficult for any contender to secure a majority of the votes. Thus while Beckham might get more votes than Rhea, he would have great difficulty getting more votes than the combined total of all other candidates. ⁶³

The administration publicly argued that its bill would prevent a minority candidate from being nominated, implying that it was more democratic than the single primary. On the other hand, the supporters of the single primary bill contended that two primaries would be too great an expense for taxpayers. Furthermore, the prospect of run-off primaries would be discouraging to good government because men best qualified to serve the public were unwilling to face the expense, labor and abuse of two nominating races. Such arguments were probably unconvincing to even the most naive of voters.

In addition to the two Senate measures, two bills were introduced in the House, one calling for single primaries and the other for run-off primaries. On February 19, 1935, the run-off bill passed the Senate by a vote of

⁶²Ibid., p. 67.

⁶³Baylor, Talbot, pp. 294-95.

twenty-two to ten.⁶⁴ The administration then sought to remove from committee in the House the single primary bill. If they could secure passage of this bill by the House, a stalemate could be created. This was attempted on February 25, but failed when they were unable to remove the bill from the House committee. This attempt was defeated by a forty-six to twenty-nine vote.⁶⁵ Realizing that there was little chance of passing a single primary bill in a Senate controlled by the administration, and believing that a run-off primary was better than no primary, anti-administration members of the House joined the Laffoon forces on February 26, and passed the run-off bill by a vote of sixty-nine to twenty.⁶⁶

Of the twenty who voted against the measure, nineteen were Republicans, indicating the opposition of the minority party to this form of nomination. One angry Republican paper declared:

The signing of the primary bill had the appearance of a Democratic 'love feast,' leaders of the administration and anti-administration factions joking with one another during the proceedings; "Governor, this is an adopted child in which we are pleased," remarked Lieutenant Governor Chandler. "Well, there will be no doubt that a majority will nominate the candidate," the Governor replied.⁶⁷

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 99.

⁶⁵Courier-Journal, February 26, 1935, p. 1.

⁶⁶Ibid., February 27, 1935, p. 1.

⁶⁷The Greenburg Record Herald, February 28, 1935, p. 1.

At a cost of \$38,000 for the special legislative session, the people of Kentucky had a compulsory primary bill. One newspaper termed the passage of the law a "victory for the people by the press."⁶⁸ Although this statement is exaggerated, it is true that the influence of public opinion, stimulated by the agitation of the press, was of great importance. "Only the assurance of popular support, encouraged and emboldened faithful public servants to seize the opportunity to restore the principle of popular suffrage," declared the Harlan Daily Enterprise.⁶⁹ Equally important, however, were the aspirations and ambitions of politicians in both factions of the Democratic Party.

Although the enactment of the primary law was a victory for democratic government, its passage cannot be attributed solely to American dedication to democracy. With greater validity, it can be argued that it was but another example of the curious combination, of one part devotion to democratic rule and one part desire for political power, that goes into the making of American politics.

Public sentiment had been satisfied; the people would nominate the party candidates. But what effects would the measure have on the Democratic Party and the gubernatorial election? Ironically enough, the bill was to be the cause

⁶⁸Harlan Daily Enterprise, February 27, 1935, p. 1.

⁶⁹Ibid.

of the defeat of its supporters and the means of victory for those who opposed it. The stage was now readied and the cast prepared to present their roles in one of the most colorful and exciting political dramas in the state's history.

CHAPTER III

THE SILENT VOTE

Before the enactment of the compulsory primary law there was little doubt that the Democratic candidate would be Thomas S. Rhea of Russellville, Kentucky. Realizing this Rhea had written a friend in January:

Old Friend, just believe me. No matter what any newspaper or any one says I am headed for the top of the world, and I don't believe any combination can stop or hinder me in the least. For I not only have a fine organization but which is better I have the people of all kinds for me.¹

The primary law probably did not destroy his optimism for it did not deny him the nomination, but it did mean that to obtain it he would have to engage several opponents in a political campaign. And there were many who were willing to do battle with him for the nomination.

Even before the controversy surrounding the passage of a primary law developed, several individuals had expressed interest in the gubernatorial nomination. In all, seven Democrats campaigned for the nomination, although two withdrew from the contest before the deadline date for filing as candidates. James Howell Richmond was the earliest aspirant to announce his availability for the

¹Thomas S. Rhea to Urey Woodson, January 13, 1935, Woodson Papers.

nomination. Richmond had been elected Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1931 with a majority greater than that of any other candidate on the Democratic ticket. During his tenure as Superintendent of Public Instruction, Richmond was a staunch supporter of better education in Kentucky. Unlike many individuals who had filled that office, Richmond had served in the field of education as a teacher, supervisor, principal and school superintendent.² Combining his career in the field of education with that of politics, he had in 1920 run for the third district congressional seat but had been defeated.³ Despite the defeat he remained in politics and in 1932 led the pre-convention campaign in Kentucky for Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Another man who sought the nomination was Nat B. Sewell. Sewell, as State Inspector and Examiner during the Laffoon administration, became "one of its most widely publicized public officials."⁴ This publicity was generated by the numerous official reports published by his office. Both Richmond and Sewell withdrew from the campaign when it became apparent that they would not receive the nomination.

On the day of the first primary, August 4, Democratic voters were presented with five men from whom to select their gubernatorial candidate. Of the five men

²Harrodsburg Herald, March 1, 1935, p. 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

running on the Democratic ticket, Bailey Wootton made the least vigorous campaign and received the fewest votes on election day.

Wootton was a native of Muhlenburg County, located in the southwestern coal fields of Kentucky. He had been elected Attorney General in 1931 and was made chairman of the Democratic Executive Committee the following year. "Known more as a listener than a talker," Wootton had avoided "as much as possible, participation in the factional controversies that featured the 1932, 1933 and 1934 sessions of the General Assembly."⁵ Wootton's speeches, when compared with the colorfulness and vigor of the Chandler-Rhea exchanges, appeared almost drab. However, a factor more important than this in his defeat was that he was relatively unknown to the general public and he lacked the organized support of any large segment of the party.

A similar situation existed in the candidacy of Elam Huddleston, who, like Wootton, lacked substantial backing. During the Laffoon administration, Huddleston served as State Treasurer. Prior to that he had been engaged in the investment banking business in Louisville for a number of years.⁶ Huddleston finished fourth in the Democratic primary.

Huddleston, Wootton, Richmond, Sewell, Rhea and Chandler were all important officials of the Laffoon

⁵Ibid.

⁶Interview with Huddleston.

administration, and all were candidates, at one time or another, for the Democratic nomination. Only one candidate was not identified with the Laffoon administration. Waging a hard fought campaign, Frederick Wallis, built up a large body of supporters.

The oldest of the gubernatorial candidates in 1935, Wallis was born in Christian County in 1869. He had enjoyed an active political career prior to 1935, but primarily outside of Kentucky's political arena. President Wilson had appointed him Commissioner of Immigration, a position which he held until the end of the Harding administration.⁷ After 1924, he was involved for five years in New York politics. Returning to Kentucky in 1929, Wallis soon became active in state politics. His campaign in 1935 centered on his advocacy of a conservative, businessman type of government. This type of approach, however, had little appeal to Kentuckians during the depression years. In the primary, Wallis' vote lagged far behind that of Rhea and Chandler.

Thomas S. Rhea was as experienced and skilled a politician as could be found in Kentucky during the 1930's. Born in 1871, he was a native of Russellville, the county seat of Logan County, located in South-Central Kentucky. Although Rhea served in numerous small offices and was a veteran of many political campaigns, he possessed the reputation of being "more of an organizer than a stump

⁷Harrodsburg Herald, March 1, 1935, p. 2.

speaker."⁸ He began his career in politics by serving as assistant in the office of Colonel Joshua D. Powers, U. S. Collector of Internal Revenue at Owensboro.⁹ Returning to his home in 1905, he was elected sheriff of Logan County. Involvement in state politics started for him in 1911 when he was elected state treasurer. Extremely active in the years that followed, he served as a delegate to the national conventions in 1912, 1920, 1924 and 1932.¹⁰ He also directed the state campaigns of Beckham in the senatorial race of 1914 and in the Democratic primary of 1927, and directed the campaign of A. O. Stanley who ran successfully for the Senate in 1919.¹¹

Although Rhea had tremendous success in managing the campaigns of other candidates, he was unable to achieve as many victories for himself at the polls. In 1915 he was defeated in an election for state auditor and in 1928 he unsuccessfully ran for Congress in the Third Congressional District. Facing certain defeat in his bid for the gubernatorial nomination in 1919, he withdrew without finishing the race.¹²

Rhea occupied a very influential position in the Laffoon administration. He quickly became the governor's

⁸Ibid.

⁹Willis, Kentucky Democracy, p. 301.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

most trusted adviser and was "generally credited with having organized the 1934 legislature for Laffoon."¹³ His importance was indicated in his appointment to the Highway Commission in 1932. As the split developed between Ben Johnson and Laffoon, Rhea's influence increased. When Johnson was removed from the Highway Commission, Rhea assumed the chairmanship of that body.

Regardless of his earlier failures at the polls, in the spring, 1935, Rhea seemed assured of the nomination. Cognizant of this fact, anti-administration forces attempted to reach an accord with Rhea. In early April, 1935, Rhea was approached by Elwood Hamilton, law partner of Beckham, and an influential Democrat in Louisville politics, who suggested that Rhea travel with him to Washington to see Barkley. He further suggested that Rhea talk with Haly in Louisville. Viewing this as an attempt by the Beckham-Haly group to draft his platform and select the rest of his ticket, Rhea refused to meet with either Barkley or Haly.¹⁴

The only real opposition confronting Rhea lay in the candidate supported by the anti-administration faction. But Rhea believed that he was prepared for any candidate advanced by this group, fully expecting it to be Beckham. But for months Beckham refused to say whether or not he

¹³Harrodsburg Herald, March 1, 1935, p. 2.

¹⁴Thomas S. Rhea to Urey Woodson, April 15, 1935, Woodson Papers.

would run. Meanwhile, Wootton, Rhea, and Richmond had all officially announced their candidacy and begun to campaign for the nomination.¹⁵ Already laboring under a number of disadvantages, the Johnson-Talbot-Chandler faction felt the urgent need to obtain a candidate who could begin campaigning.

Then, on April 25, Beckham announced that he would not seek the Democratic nomination. Contradictory evidence can be found to explain Beckham's decision. Orval Baylor, in his book J. Dan Talbot, Champion of Good Government, states, without citing his source of authority, that Beckham told Talbot that he would not run because "his political career had been long and stormy and he had no desire to prolong it. Old age, too, had crept upon him and he did not feel equal to the task his friends would impose upon him."¹⁶ Finally, Beckham stated that "Mrs. Beckham also had influenced him by indicating that the prospect of his candidacy was distasteful to her."¹⁷ Much of the material in Baylor's book is of this variety and it seems likely that Talbot did recount the story to the author. That Talbot was told of Beckham's decision prior to his public announcement is verified by Chandler, with whom

¹⁵Courier-Journal, March 14, April 1, April 19, 1935. Wootton announced his candidacy on March 13, Rhea his on March 30 and Richmond on April 18, 1935.

¹⁶Baylor, Talbot, p. 317.

¹⁷Ibid.

Talbot talked immediately after seeing Beckham.¹⁸ Thus it is probable that such a conversation did take place. But that Beckham's decision was made for these reasons is questionable. There is some evidence which suggests that Beckham was anxious to run for governor again, but was dissuaded by friends, who having seen him defeated three times, twice for United States Senator, and once for governor, felt that his candidacy at that time would not be advisable.¹⁹ Possibly Talbot, who seems to have been most responsible for organization of the anti-administration's campaign, was influential in persuading Beckham not to run.

Informed by Talbot of Beckham's decision, Chandler immediately called a press conference where he announced his own candidacy, declaring that he sought the nomination only because Beckham was disinclined to do so. For several reasons, Chandler's candidacy was more advantageous to the anti-administration faction than that of Beckham. The most important factor was that Chandler was the avowed anti-administration man behind whom all anti-administration elements could unite. A relative newcomer to politics, Chandler had alienated few outside the administration faction. On the other hand, Beckham's anti-racing platform in 1927 had displeased many Central Kentucky Democrats who would be free to march under Chandler's

¹⁸Interview with Chandler.

¹⁹Urey Woodson to Daniel C. Roper, July 12, 1935, Woodson Papers.

banner. Another factor in Chandler's favor was that much of Johnson's following in the Fourth Congressional District was an anti-Beckham vote that Johnson could deliver to Chandler but which he would have difficulty delivering to Beckham. Finally, the most favorable factor in Chandler's candidacy was his opposition against the sales tax and his fight for the compulsory primary. These two issues tended to popularize Chandler at a time when Beckham was in political retirement.

Without the sales tax and primary issues, Chandler would have been in 1935 a relatively unknown politician. Like Beckham, Chandler had been elected lieutenant governor at the relatively early age of thirty-seven years. Born in Corydon, in Western Kentucky, Chandler's life was of the Horatio Alger variety. His parents separated while he was very young, and he spent most of his youth living with different aunts and uncles.²⁰ Striking out on his own while still an adolescent, he financed his secondary education and college. In 1924 he earned a law degree at the University of Kentucky and five years later was elected state senator.²¹

Kentucky's Democrats were presented with a variety of candidates, all possessing different backgrounds and qualifications. For those who believed the state needed the guidance of a young man there was Chandler. Voters who

²⁰Willis, Kentucky Democracy, p. 24.

²¹Ibid., p. 27.

preferred a man who possessed a great deal of experience in politics could support Rhea. Advocates of a conservative approach to government had a representative in Wallis, while those who liked a candidate with a background in financial matters could cast their ballot for Huddleston. The Republicans lacked this variety, but they also avoided the factional strife which characterized the Democratic campaign.

II

Although the Democratic primary overshadowed it, the Republicans also nominated their candidate in a primary. Three men sought the Republican nomination, but there never was any real opposition made to the candidacy of King Swope.

Swope was a native of Danville, Kentucky and a resident of Fayette County, located in the heart of Kentucky's Bluegrass region. His political career began in 1919, when, at the age of twenty-five, he was elected to Congress from the Seventh District.²² In 1931 he was appointed by Governor Flem Sampson as Twenty-Second Circuit Judge. He subsequently, was elected to serve out the remainder of the term of the previous circuit judge and in 1933 he was elected to that office for a full six-year term.²³

²²Courier-Journal, September 24, 1961, p. 2.

²³Ibid.

Providing only minor opposition to the Swope candidacy were Judge D. M. Bingham of Pineville and Judge Sam Hurst of Beattyville. Neither candidate campaigned extensively nor received substantial public support. The significance of their candidacies lay in the fact that they gave the Republican contest the nominal appearance of a primary. Swope largely ignored both Bingham and Hurst, conducting his campaign as if he had already secured the nomination.

The Republicans traditionally had chosen their candidates by convention, but with the passage of the compulsory primary law this course of action was closed to them. With the entry of more than one gubernatorial candidate, even though they presented little opposition, some Republicans became alarmed that the disharmony which was disrupting the Democratic Party threatened the G. O. P. To circumvent the primary law and offset the threat posed by multiple candidates, the Republican Executive Committee announced on June 1, 1935, that a convention would be held at Lexington on June 18, for the purpose of recommending Republican candidates for all elective offices except that of governor.²⁴ Although the decision of the convention could not be final, it was obvious that the leaders would tolerate no opposition to the choices made. These leaders apparently sought to place the strongest possible ticket on the ballot; one which would allow them to capitalize on

²⁴Ibid., September 24, 1961, p. 2.

the split within Democratic ranks.

After the convention was called, speculation was raised in some quarters that a few Republican leaders were dissatisfied with Judge King Swope and were considering placing another man in the field as the organization candidate for governor. This question was first raised by the Democratic Lexington Herald which stated: "The amusement the Republican Party enjoyed because of the strife between the Democrats, is being threatened by discord and factionalism within their own party."²⁵ The Lexington paper argued that the resignation of Federal Judge Charles Dawson which occurred on the same day the convention was announced, was an indication of possible disharmony within the Republican Party. Dawson in his statement of resignation said that he would continue to serve on the bench until a successor was appointed and sworn in, provided that it was not later than June 15.²⁶ The paper claimed that June 15 was extremely significant because it was "the date generally decided upon as the beginning of the intensive gubernatorial campaign."²⁷ The paper also noted that Dawson had been the Republican's gubernatorial candidate in 1923 and he remained one of his party's leaders. The paper concluded that all of this indicated dissension within the party. Finally, the paper pointed to the fact

²⁵Lexington Herald, June 2, 1935, p. 1.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

that while the Republican Committee excluded the gubernatorial candidate from those to be recommended, it did not endorse the candidacy of Swope.

These accusations were refuted by Republican papers such as the Lexington Leader and Cincinnati Enquirer. Both papers denied that Dawson sought the nomination and both charged that those who drew such implications from his resignation were merely attempting to distract voters' attentions from the fighting in the Democratic Party. Commenting on this subject the Lexington Leader declared:

In announcing his decision, Judge Dawson said he was stepping down from the bench in order to enter private practice and thus increase his earnings. That would have been an extremely impolitic statement for a prospective candidate to make, but some Democrats, overlooking absurdity of the prognostication in their eagerness to find some obstacle in the way of Circuit Judge King Swope, advanced the idea that Judge Dawson might have his eye on the mansion.²⁸

Expressing opinions similar to those of the Lexington Leader, William Mason, Frankfort correspondent for the Cincinnati Enquirer concluded:

Judge Dawson's announcement said he was retiring so he could re-enter private life to make provision for his family. Kentucky's graveyard of the governorship from which only an occasional Lazarus emerges, hardly can be counted as the lure that makes Judge Dawson resign from the Federal bench.²⁹

No evidence, other than the article of the Lexington

²⁸Lexington Leader, June 9, 1935, p. 1.

²⁹Cincinnati Enquirer, June 9, 1935, p. 4.

Herald, was found which suggested that Judge Lawson ever considered running in the 1935 primary. It seems likely that the opinions of the Lexington Leader and Cincinnati Enquirer were accurate.

Despite the forecasts of possible stormy proceedings at the convention, the recommendations were made with little controversy. If any Republican leaders were dissatisfied with Swope's candidacy, there was no outward indication of it at the convention. Although the convention was to recommend no gubernatorial candidate, scores of county conventions, which met to select delegates to the state meeting, passed resolutions endorsing the candidacy of King Swope.³⁰ It seems probable that no gubernatorial recommendation was made by the convention because Swope had the support of almost all Republicans.

The Republican convention met at Lexington with little conflict. The only significant battle occurred in the choice of the candidate for attorney general. Daniel Davies of Newport obtained the recommendation by beating Paul Basham of Hardinburg. Before Davies won, however, several bitter quarrels and a fist fight had occurred.³¹ This struggle developed because "of the failure of the party's leaders to 'slate' in pre-convention conferences a northern Kentuckian. The northern delegation, controlling

³⁰Courier-Journal, June 16, 1935, p. 3.

³¹Kentucky Post, June 19, 1935, clipping in King Swope Scrapbooks, Archives Division, Margaret King Library, University of Kentucky.

a large block of votes, organized for the fight on the floor and refused to yield an inch during the balloting that brought Davies' recommendation."³²

In the other contests, candidates not on the recommended slate drawn up by party leaders "withdrew" without being nominated, or quit before the roll call was completed. The recommendations passed by the convention were the same as those that appeared on the ballots in the November general election. J. J. Kavanagh of Louisville became the Republican Party's candidate for lieutenant governor. The nomination for secretary of state went to Catherine W. Morrow of Somerset while that of auditor went to J. B. Allen of Paintsville. Charles Cole of Harlan sought the office of state treasurer and W. J. Moore of Richmond ran for the office of superintendent of public instruction. The rest of Republican ticket was made up of Andrew Alexander, candidate for commissioner of agriculture and Joseph Martin, candidate for clerk of the court of appeals.³³ "Geographic recognition was the most conspicuous asset of the ticket slated by the Republicans."³⁴ On the ticket there were candidates from Western, Southcentral, Southeastern, Northern Kentucky and from the Bluegrass and Louisville regions of the state.

³²Kentucky Times Star, June 19, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

³³Courier-Journal, June 19, 1935, p. 1.

³⁴Ibid.

Republicans saw in the convention a way of guaranteeing a strong ticket on election day. The Democratic candidate later made an issue of the convention, charging that Swope "represented a system that believes in government by a few men rather than by the masses. . . ." ³⁵ Speaking of the Republican convention on one occasion, Chandler asserted: "The Republican ticket was named by the Republican bosses at a boss-controlled convention, and then forced down the throats of 150,000 Republican voters in their primary." ³⁶ However, not many Republicans agreed with the assertions of Chandler. Their sentiments were expressed in papers such as the Casey County News which stated:

Harmony was the keynote. The convention had a song of hate (for the Laffoon administration and the sales tax), a song of love (for Judge King Swope who spoke briefly), . . . It is the consensus of opinion that an outstanding ticket has been commended to the voters of the state. ³⁸

The convention over, the Republicans were prepared to wage a spirited election campaign.

³⁵Ibid., October 19, 1935, p. 2.

³⁶Ibid., October 16, 1935, p. 4.

³⁷Casey County News, June 16, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

III

By the first of May the candidates of both political parties were traveling throughout the state delivering campaign speeches. Earliest of the Republicans to start campaigning was King Swope. In all his addresses, he directed his attacks against the Democratic candidates, principally Rhea and Chandler, and for the most part ignored the other Republican candidates whom he was supposedly contesting for the nomination. He conducted his entire primary campaign as if he were already the Republican nominee. At first he concentrated his assault upon the factionalism and what he considered inefficiency of the Laffoon administration. On one occasion the Republican candidate declared:

Of the present state administration, it can now be truthfully said that the state is in the octopus-like clutches of the most corrupt, the most incompetent, the most extravagant and the most oppressive administration that ever disgraced the state of Kentucky.³⁸

Until mid-May Swope continued the campaign strategy of attacking the administration. In June, he suddenly relented in his attacks. Prior to that time Swope had been "campaigning the state as if it were late October, the settlement of issues two weeks away. He worked hard

³⁸Lexington Leader, March 31, 1935, p. 1.

although the general opinion was that he had the Republican nomination sewed up."³⁹ This change of pace in Swope's campaign occurred simultaneously with an increase in the fervency of the Democratic campaigns. The Democratic primary had become extremely heated, with four of the five candidates making speeches which could only do harm to the candidate supported by the administration. Chandler was not the only Democratic candidate attacking the administration. Wootton, Huddleston and Wallis, all criticized the Laffoon-Rhea management of state affairs. The slowing of Swope's campaign pace was obviously made in the realization that criticisms of Laffoon and Rhea carried more conviction when uttered by other Democrats. More importantly, Republican chances of success in November could possibly be enhanced by intensifying the split within the Democratic Party. The easiest way of accomplishing this would be to remain as quiet as possible, thus freeing the Democrats to fight among themselves. "And the quieter . . . Swope became, the heavier became the firing at the Laffoon-Rhea control."⁴⁰

While Swope engaged in this type of campaign, the other Republican candidates delivered only a few speeches. These attracted little attention and were of minute importance in the election.

Unlike their Republican counterparts, the five

³⁹Courier-Journal, July 21, 1935, p. 10.

⁴⁰Ibid.

Democratic candidates battled one another for the nomination. As election day neared, more and more of the speeches of Wootton, Huddleston, Wallis and Chandler were directed against the Laffoon-Rhea control. The pounding away at the candidacy of Thomas Rhea by the other four candidates was due to the fact that Rhea, with the backing of the Laffoon administration, was generally conceded to have a marked advantage in the primary.

Officially opening his campaign at a barbecue and rally on June 9, Rhea worked hard to win the nomination. He took little notice of candidates other than Chandler, who he depicted as a man with small intelligence and no real grasp of the state's needs. Rhea argued that if Chandler was permitted to revoke the sales tax he would undermine the financial structure of the state. Furthermore, Chandler's pledge to do so, Rhea asserted, was an indication of his unrealistic approach to the economic problems of the state.

Rhea was especially critical of Chandler's relationship with Ben Johnson and Lan Talbot. According to Rhea, Johnson's support of Chandler was motivated, not by Chandler's stand on the various issues, but by the "fact that an army of Mr. Johnson's relatives had been on the state's payroll during Mr. Johnson's tenure as State Highway Commissioner."⁴¹ Alleging that these relatives had drawn \$128,000 in four years, Rhea said, "naturally they fight

⁴¹Ibid., July 14, 1935, p. 7.

being weaned away from the public teat."⁴² He continually described Chandler "as a putty man in the hands of Uncle Ben Johnson" or as a "jumping jack who jumps when Ben Johnson pulls the strings."⁴³ Chandler responded to these charges by observing: "I was not putty in the hands of Tom and Ruby when they were trying to disfranchise every voter in the State by denying you a primary."⁴⁴

Rhea denounced not only Chandler but also Johnson. Speaking figuratively of Johnson's association with the Sampson administration, which it will be recalled was formed for the purpose of defeating Beckham, Rhea stated: "In 1927 I saw Ben Johnson shoot from ambush the man who is now using honey words for him."⁴⁵ With reference to Johnson's association with Laffoon, Rhea declared that he had "saved a Democratic administration from Ben Johnson when he saw the latter 'crouched with a knife in his hand' ready to stab the administration in the back."⁴⁶ Also in a figurative manner, Johnson repudiated Rhea's assertions by declaring:

I can't express myself in the face of the utter hellishness of such a falsehood. When Tom Rhea said I had a knife drawn on Laffoon he lied. I've not been armed for years and am not going to arm

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., August 3, 1935, p. 4.

⁴⁴Ibid., August 24, 1935, p. 5.

⁴⁵Lexington Herald, August 3, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁶Herald Post, August 1, 1935, p. 1.

myself, but I would be afraid to meet a man in the dark who would utter such a charge as Tom Thea uttered.⁴⁷

All of Rhea's speeches were not devoted to a denunciation of Chandler and his associates. He continually defended the measures of the Laffoon administration. Measures, such as the sales tax, he argued were necessary to permit the state to meet the emergency caused by the depression. Another dominant theme in Rhea's campaign was that the actions of the Chandler faction were destroying the Democratic Party in Kentucky. One of his favorite statements dealing with the factionalism which had disrupted the party was that there "must be a pruning of the political barnacles that have so long clung to our ship of state."⁴⁸

While Rhea was directing his attention to Chandler, the three minor candidates and Chandler directed their attacks upon the Laffoon administration. Wootton dealt in personalities to a lesser degree than any of the other candidates, confining most of his speeches to economic matters. Although he had aided Laffoon and Rhea in their fight for the sales tax, in the primary contest he voiced opposition to its re-enactment. Under the provisions of the 1934 law, the sales tax would be removed, unless re-enacted by the legislature, in June, 1936. To replace the revenue received through the sales tax, Wootton promised

⁴⁷Courier-Journal, August 3, 1935, p. 4.

⁴⁸Lexington Herald, August 3, 1935, p. 1.

to reduce governmental expenses, which he argued would result in a savings of more than four million dollars annually. If this did not meet the state's needs he would levy a graduated income tax.⁴⁹ The rest of Wootton's platform embodied those principles which are enumerated so often in political addresses that they have acquired a sanctity second only to that of the Ten Commandments. Among other things, he advocated representation of all the people in the administration of the government, and the further reorganization of the state government for greater efficiency.⁵⁰

Wootton was joined by Frederick Wallis in his indictment of the management of the state's finances. Advocating measures such as removal of education from politics, use of the highway department only for non-political purposes, and describing the sales tax as "an abomination," Wallis pledged to the voters a business-like administration of the state government. In dealing with the factional split within his party, Wallis concluded in a manner wholly favorable to himself, that the two factions were so bitterly aligned against each other that it was very unlikely that the losing group would support the winner in November. The only hope for a Democratic victory, then, rested in the nomination of a man not aligned with either faction, who could unite all elements of the

⁴⁹Courier-Journal, July 10, 1935, p. 14.

⁵⁰Ibid., August 1, 1935, p. 22.

party.⁵¹

In his bid for the nomination, Elam Huddleston, also dealt extensively with matters of a financial nature. Unlike Wootton, Wallis and Chandler, Huddleston endorsed the sales tax, but with the necessities of life, such as food and clothing exempted. To replenish the state treasury, he proposed an income tax, a reduction in expenses, and a "kicking out of the political crooks, and thieves, be they Democrats or Republicans."⁵² A measure proposed solely by Huddleston was the taxing of holders of tax-exempt securities, who, Huddleston stated, were "those most able to pay taxes but who do not have to pay."⁵³

Of interest to all the Democratic candidates, was the endorsement of J. C. W. Beckham. But it was July before he made any announcement. Prior to the announcement all the candidates claimed that they had the support of Beckham's following. Despite the claims of the aspirants and the delay by Beckham in declaring his choice, there was really little doubt whom he would support. He was closely associated with Elwood Hamilton, Percy Haly, Robert W. Bingham, all of whom supported Chandler. Baylor states that Beckham had told Talbot, at the time he informed him of his decision not to run, that he would support Chandler, but

⁵¹Lexington Herald, August 3, 1935, p. 1.

⁵²Courier-Journal, July 21, 1935, p. 8.

⁵³Ibid.

that he wanted to handle the matter himself.⁵⁴ This story appears legitimate because of the assistance rendered Chandler by Beckham after he announced his endorsement of Chandler's candidacy.

Chandler's campaign was unsurpassed in energy and vitality. Opening it at Newport on May 9, Chandler labeled Rhea "Sales Tax Tom," charging that Rhea and Laffoon had brought about the passage of the sales tax "in order to provide more funds for a political machine to further thwart the will of the people."⁵⁵ The sales tax issue became a dominant theme in Chandler's campaign and proved to be his most effective weapon. He repeatedly pledged to repeal the sales tax if elected, but never clearly stated in what manner he would replace the revenue brought in by the tax.

In his campaign addresses there was also found the jargon of the aspiring politician. He promised to promote more efficient government through a "strict budgetary control of expenditures," adjustment of the tax program "to produce only sufficient revenue to meet the necessary requirement," and the appointment of "honest, conscientious, capable, and faithful men and women."⁵⁶ In his speeches, Chandler also drew attention to areas of needed reform in Kentucky. He denounced the deplorable conditions

⁵⁴Baylor, Talbot, p. 317.

⁵⁵Courier-Journal, May 10, 1935, p. 9.

⁵⁶Ibid.

which existed in the penal and charitable institutions and pledged himself to correct them if elected governor.

As August 3, the day for the primary, approached, each candidate expressed confidence in his own ultimate victory. The weather was clear and warm across the state on election day and over 600,000 voters marched to the polls. As had been expected Swope easily defeated his other two opponents, thus securing the Republican nomination. In a one-sided vote Swope received 139,985 votes, Judge Bingham 13,490 and Judge Hurst, a vote of 10,670.⁵⁷ The rest of Swope's slate was also nominated.

The vote in the Democratic primary showed little resemblance to that in the Republican primary. Although the voter turnout was not as large as that in the 1932 Presidential election, it was greater than Laffoon's in 1931 and was the largest ever in a primary. "Normally a vote of approximately 300,000 could be expected in a Democratic primary."⁵⁸ In 1927, 299,673 Democrats had voted in the primary. Almost a decade later, in 1935, 449,891 Democrats indicated their choice for the gubernatorial candidate.⁵⁹ The length of time between the 1927 and 1935 primaries lessens somewhat the significance of the increase. However, in the 1932 senatorial primary only

⁵⁷Election Returns (Primaries), Office of Secretary of State, Frankfort, Kentucky.

⁵⁸Courier-Journal, August 4, 1935, p. 10.

⁵⁹Malcolm E. Jewell, Kentucky Votes (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1963), 11, 15.

187,420 Democrats voted.⁶⁰ This suggests that the increase in the 1935 primary was not merely the result of an increase in potential voters. Of greatest significance was the influence of the depression on voter behavior. During those years, discontent was expressed oftentimes at the polls. In Kentucky voter participation increased tremendously during the 1930's. This was particularly true of the gubernatorial primaries. For instance, 516,021 Democrats participated in the 1939 gubernatorial primary, as compared to 253,136 in 1943 and 288,252 in 1947.⁶¹ This trend continued even into the 1950's when only slightly more than 300,000 voted in the 1951 gubernatorial primary. Thus the large vote in the 1935 primary can be partially attributed to the general increase in voter interest during the depression. At the same time, the intense nature of the campaign generated interest which was demonstrated at the polls.

Rhea received the largest vote in the primary with a total of 203,010. Although Chandler, with a vote of 189,515, received 15,000 fewer votes than Rhea, he still polled a vote greater than that given any candidate in a previous gubernatorial primary. The other three Democratic candidates received a combined total of 57,307. Wallis got the highest vote of the three with 38,410. Huddleston received 15,501 votes and Wootton got 3,395.⁶²

⁶⁰Ibid., I, 21.

⁶¹Ibid., II, 21, 27, 31.

⁶²Ibid., p. 15.

A county by county analysis of the 1927 and 1935 primaries shows that the increase in voting was general over all of the state. However, certain areas had greater increases than others. Of the thirty-two counties which showed an increase of nearly 50% or better, nineteen were located in the eastern mountain region of the state. Since the Civil War, this area had been the bulwark of Republicanism in the state. A general increase in Democratic voters in this region can be attributed to the fact that it was the hardest hit by the depression. The policies and programs of the Roosevelt administration did much to increase Democratic voters in the area. Furthermore, the United Mine Workers, which usually endorsed Democratic candidates during this period, was actively organizing in the state's eastern coal fields.

Of the nineteen counties in Eastern Kentucky which showed marked increases in voter participation, sixteen cast a majority of their votes for Rhea. This can be explained by looking at the voting patterns of the 1925 and 1927 gubernatorial primaries. In both elections, Democrats had to choose between an administration and anti-administration candidate. In both primaries, Eastern Kentucky had given the administration candidate large majorities. This can be attributed to the fact that the incumbent administration was oftentimes strongest in those areas with little local patronage. As the number of Democratic voters increased in the area, Rhea, as the

administration's candidate, naturally became the recipient of a large percentage of the increase.

Actually Rhea's gains were not as great as they first appear. Chandler made slight gains in some northeastern counties, such as Rowan, Elliott, and Carter — which had been aligned with the administration in 1927. Furthermore, although Chandler carried only three of counties in the region which showed sharp increases in voter participation, they were the more heavily populated Harlan, Floyd, and Pike counties. Harlan County had an amazing increase of over 1800%. It cast a large majority for Chandler.

Seven more of the counties which had large increases in voter participation were located in the south-central and Pennyroyal regions of the state. This was Rhea's home territory and he amassed large votes in all of these counties. This was particularly significant for it was a part of the state which had given overwhelming support to anti-administration candidates prior to 1935.

In all, Rhea carried twenty-eight out of the thirty-two counties having greater than average increases in Democratic voting. The other two of these counties which Rhea carried were Webster and Union, both located in the Owensboro-Henderson area of Western Kentucky. Prior to 1935, the anti-administration faction had enjoyed a slight advantage in that area. The switch was not decisive for the anti-administration forces recaptured Union County in

the run-off primary.

The most important county showing a tremendous growth in voter participation was Jefferson County. As the most populated county in the state, Jefferson County and Louisville was the scene of intense campaigning by both Rhea and Chandler. Although both candidates publicly voiced assurances of carrying the county, the pre-election forecasters were predicting that Rhea, who had the backing of Mayor Neville Miller of Louisville, and of the powerful organization of Mike Brennan, would get the most votes in the county. As the early returns were counted it appeared that Rhea would carry the heavily populated area by a large plurality. This lead was accumulated in precincts in the central section of Louisville. As the ballots from the out-lying precincts of the county were counted Rhea's lead slowly diminished. The counting was extremely slow by present-day standards and as late as August 10, Rhea still maintained a marginal lead. But in the final tabulation Chandler carried the county by the narrow margin of six hundred votes.⁶³ Several factors account for Chandler's victory in Jefferson County. His opposition to the sales tax earned him the support of Louisville's leading merchants. There was also the fact that Chandler was supported by Leland Taylor, political rival of Mike Brennan in Louisville politics.

⁶³Ibid., p. 14. In Jefferson County Chandler polled 24,165 votes and Rhea 23,565 votes.

Rhea's strength was concentrated principally in Western, South-Central, and South-Eastern Kentucky, while most of Chandler's support came from the central Bluegrass and northern regions of the state. There are, of course, exceptions to this generalization. For instance, Rhea carried Carroll and Gallatin counties in Northern Kentucky, while Chandler took Harlan County in Eastern Kentucky and Warren County in the southern portion of the state. This pattern differs somewhat from that laid down in the 1923 and 1927 primaries. The changes in Eastern Kentucky have already been noted, as has Rhea's gains in south-central and Pennroyal sections of the state. The Jackson Purchase region had been overwhelmingly anti-administration in 1923 and 1927. In 1935, Rhea made substantial gains, carrying three of its counties. However, the anti-administration forces still were predominant, with Chandler taking two counties and the other three candidates carrying three counties. Rhea also made inroads into anti-administration country in the Western Coal and Mountain region of the state. In this area Rhea did well in Butler, Crittenden, Hopkins, Mulhenberg, Livingston, Ohio and Lyon counties. Much of Rhea's vote in this region can be attributed to Laffoon whose home was there.

Rhea's gains in these regions were offset by anti-administration gains in the Bluegrass and northern sections of the state. Before 1935, the Bluegrass area had been fairly evenly divided between the administration and

anti-administration forces. In 1935, this area was solidly pro-Chandler. The reasons for this are many. First of all, Chandler's home was in Versailles, which is located in the heart of the Bluegrass region. Secondly, opposition to the sales tax was great there. Lastly, a great deal of Johnson's support lay in this area. Perhaps the most startling change in 1935 was found in Northern Kentucky. In 1923, and 1927, this area had been very pro-administration. Chandler carried all but Carroll and Gallatin counties. Much of the opposition to the sales tax centered in the Covington-Newport area, and this probably accounts for Chandler's vote in Northern Kentucky in 1935.

This geographical division of the state by the two major candidates is fairly obvious. Not so apparent is the fact that for the most part, Rhea carried the poorer counties in the state while Chandler acquired the vote of a greater number of the wealthier counties. Of the counties with property values of one to twenty dollars per acre, Chandler took twenty-one and Rhea forty-two.⁶⁴ Of those counties with property values of twenty-one to fifty dollars, Rhea carried seventeen as compared to Chandler's twenty-two. The division between wealthier and poorer counties is demonstrated by the fact that of the counties with property values of fifty to one hundred dollars per acre, thirteen voted for Chandler and only three for

⁶⁴U. S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census: Agriculture (Washington, L. C.: Government Printing, 1943), 1, 16-25.

Rhea.⁶⁵

This division is further exemplified in a comparison of the rent value of housing in each of the counties. For example, there were sixty-seven counties whose values ranged from three to nine dollars.⁶⁶ From this total, Rhea carried forty-six counties as compared to Chandler's twenty-one. Of forty-five counties whose housing units rented at an average value of from nine to twenty-one dollars, twenty-nine cast majorities for Chandler, while Rhea carried only sixteen.⁶⁷

There is no single explanation for the fact that Rhea attracted more support in the poorer counties of the state. Part of it can be attributed to the administration's patronage which controlled many of the votes in the poorer counties. This was particularly true of Eastern Kentucky. Many of the less wealthy counties were located in the southern and western portions of the state. This was Rhea's home territory.

Much of Chandler's support in Central Kentucky can also be attributed to the fact that it was his home. More important, however, was his opposition to the sales tax which earned him the support of Kentucky's Retail Merchants Association. This organization had actively opposed the

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶U. S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census: Housing (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1942), II, 281-95.

⁶⁷Ibid.

passage of the sales tax throughout Laffoon's administration. The association did not accept defeat with the passage of the bill. Instead, it immediately started to work to prevent its re-enactment. This could be accomplished easily if a candidate could be elected who opposed the sales tax. The organization thus sent out numerous circulars to its members urging them to vote and support any candidate opposed to the tax.⁶⁸ The activity of this group was concentrated in the northern and central regions and in the Louisville area. Undoubtedly, their efforts were of value to Chandler. In fact, some of the bulletins of the organization specifically endorsed his candidacy.

Organized labor was inactive in the first primary. No evidence has been uncovered to indicate that any of the railroad unions or other unions supported either Rhea or Chandler.

The role of Negro voting is difficult to ascertain. No direct appeal was made to that segment of the population by either candidate. However, it is interesting to note that Rhea carried forty-four counties with a Negro population of less than five per cent as compared to Chandler's twenty-two counties.⁶⁹ Rhea's larger number was principally due to the fact that many of the counties

⁶⁸The Underwood Collection contains a number of the publications of the Kentucky Retail Merchants Association entitled The Kentucky Merchant.

⁶⁹U. S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census: Population Characteristics (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1945), I, pp. 211-34.

FIGURE I
DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY
COUNTY VOTE DISTRIBUTION

Campus Book Store-Lexington Ky.

- Counties carried by Chandler
- Counties carried by Rhea
- Counties carried by other candidates

with small Negro populations are located in Eastern Kentucky. When a comparison is made of the counties with Negro population above five per cent a more even distribution is found. Of these counties, Chandler carried twenty-five and Rhea seventeen.⁷⁰ Thus, it does not appear that a large Negro vote was given to either candidate.

There were many reasons for the large voter turnout in the 1935 election, just as there were many factors affecting the outcome of the election. The sales tax was of great importance because of the popular opposition to it. This issue was probably most decisive in Northern and Central Kentucky and Jefferson County, where it was most unpopular. This factor, of course, enhanced Chandler's vote. However, the sales tax issue was not the only factor responsible for the heavy voter participation. This is indicated by the record-breaking vote given to Rhea, who was generally credited with the passage of the tax measure. A part of Rhea's vote can be attributed to the administration's control of patronage. At a time when jobs were at a minimum, many individuals on the state's payroll probably feared a Rhea defeat and thus turned out in large numbers at the polls.

Another factor not to be dismissed was the excitement generated by the fervor and controversy caused by the split within the Democratic Party. This extreme factionalism created increased interest and fostered feelings of loyalty

⁷⁰Ibid.

on behalf of both of the major candidates.

One newspaper asserted that the unusually large vote "was dependent largely upon the 'silent vote' which often forgets about election day, or is kept from the polls by inclement weather."⁷¹ The "silent vote" turned out in 1935, the paper indicated because of "some heated state senatorial elections."⁷² Although this analysis excludes factors of greater importance, such as the sales tax, it does point out one element. Certainly, interest in local elections served to increase the interest and vote in the primary. However, this factor was of less significance than that of the sales tax or factionalism.

No gubernatorial candidate in the August primary received a majority of the votes. Under the provisions of the compulsory primary law of 1935, the two candidates receiving the largest number of votes were required to contest each other for the nomination in a run-off primary election on the first Saturday in September. This, of course, meant that Rhea and Chandler would have to do battle again for the nomination. Although the other three candidates had been eliminated, their vote assumed great importance for both of the major candidates. Combined, the vote of Wootton, Huddleston, and Wallis constituted only 12.7 per cent of the total vote, but if added to either Rhea's 45.1 per cent or Chandler's 42.1 per cent of

⁷¹Herald Post, August 9, 1935, p. 7.

⁷²Ibid.

the vote, it would give him the nomination.

Chandler and Rhea were not the only candidates forced into a run-off primary. Only two candidates, and they were both on Rhea's slate, received the Democratic nomination in the first primary. They were Garth K. Ferguson who was nominated for Commissioner of Agriculture and Harry W. Peters who received the nomination for Superintendent of Public Instruction. None of the other candidates on Rhea's or Chandler's slate secured a majority of the votes. Rhea's candidate for lieutenant governor, Keen Johnson, had 119,058 votes while J. L. Wise, who ran on Chandler's slate and received 59,655 votes.⁷³ The importance of Louisville's vote is demonstrated by the fact that three of the candidates on Rhea's ticket and three on Chandler's ticket were from Louisville. On Rhea's ticket these included C. T. Arnett, who sought the nomination of Secretary of State, Sarah W. Mahan who ran for State Treasurer and R. H. Kirchdorfer who sought the nomination for Clerk of the Court of Appeals. Those from Louisville on Chandler's ticket were Naja Eudley who campaigned for the nomination of Secretary of State, J. E. Breckingham who ran for State Treasurer and his candidate for Clerk of the Court of Appeals, W. B. O'Connell. The rest of

⁷³Courier-Journal, August 13, 1935, p. 2. The other candidates for lieutenant governor and their votes were: R. F. Wright, 36,520; J. T. Murphy, 19,899; W. O. Smith, 17,622; Munnell Wilson, 12,421; T. B. Roberts, 10,639; T. C. Wright, 10,516; and Ed Vanover 4,209.

Chandler's slate was made up of L. A. Logan, nominee for state auditor and W. M. Vincent who sought the attorney general's nomination. Rhea's candidates for these two offices were E. H. Shannon and F. M. Burke.

Once the returns of the primary were official all of these candidates started campaigning again. After innumerable speeches and rallies the voters would once again be given an opportunity to chose their gubernatorial candidate.

CHAPTER IV

THE RUN-OFF PRIMARY

Little time elapsed after the August primary before both the gubernatorial candidates were campaigning again. Chandler was the first of the two candidates to start the run-off contest. Commenting on the first primary, on August 7, he said:

Rhea's machine has hit a stone wall and finished its course. The result of the primary has forcefully and clearly demonstrated that a majority of Democratic voters in Kentucky cannot be browbeaten or intimidated by any machine or purchased by any amount of money.¹

Unlike Chandler, Rhea's initial move in the campaign was marked by a desire to slow the pace of the campaign. In a somewhat surprising step, on August 8, Rhea proposed that Chandler and he discontinue all political discussion during the weeks before the run-off primary. Arguing that the "voters were sufficiently advised about the positions of the two candidates to vote intelligently," Rhea stated that by such an agreement he hoped "to allay the political fires so the party would be in a better shape for the November election."² Refusing to agree to such an arrangement, Chandler described Rhea's proposal as a desire for an

¹Lexington Leader, August 8, 1935, p. 1.

²Courier-Journal, August 9, 1935, p. 1.

armistice in light of certain defeat.³

Although Rhea had on many occasions expressed, both privately and publicly, concern for the party's well being, Chandler's reaction contained an element of truth. Confidence among Democrats in the Rhea organization was shaken by the loss of traditional administration strongholds such as Northern Kentucky.⁴ Many politicians began to doubt that Rhea could defeat Chandler's rising popularity and to question Rhea's reputation as a master-mind in politics.⁵ Twice Rhea had made serious miscalculations which were having disastrous effects on his bid for governor. Twice in 1935, he had the nomination in the palm of his hand and through errors in judgment lost it. The first mistake occurred when the popular demand for a primary arose. In January, 1935, Rhea had written a friend that either a primary or a convention would suit him.⁶ If this was true, it would have been far wiser for him to have worked for a primary. Instead, he and Laffoon, ignoring public sentiment, persuaded the Executive Committee to call for a convention, thereby, seemingly assuring Rhea of the nomination. The nomination which was his was then lost when Governor Laffoon and he journeyed to Washington. Then, within a week, Rhea, by endorsing the run-off primary

³Henderson Morning Gleaner, August 10, 1935, p. 6.

⁴Courier-Journal, August 11, 1935, p. 10.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Thomas S. Rhea to Urey Woodson, January 21, 1935, Woodson Papers.

bill, made what would become a disastrous mistake. The run-off primary law gave Chandler another month in which to perfect an organization and carry his campaign to the people. In his call for an end to political campaigning, Rhea sought to minimize the advantages he had given Chandler.

After the August primary Rhea and Chandler immediately tried to obtain the endorsements of the three minor candidates. The most important of these was Wallis who had polled over 38,000 votes. Commenting on this subject one paper stated: "Conceding for the sake of argument, that both Rhea and Chandler, polled their top strength . . . , the one that receives the Wallis-Klair vote in September will have a majority."⁷ Much of Wallis' support had come from the Billy Klair organization in Lexington. Thus this man's influence had great bearing on Wallis' decision. Klair had disagreed with the Laffoon administration over the removal of highway commissioner Charles Fennell of Lexington and many persons expected him to support Chandler.⁸ On August 15, 1935, Wallis announced that he would support Chandler. He stated that he believed that the lieutenant governor "would be thousands of votes stronger than Thomas S. Rhea in the November election."⁹ Five days

⁷The Corbin Times, August 10, 1935, p. 1.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Henderson Morning Gleaner, August 16, 1935, p. 7.

later, Billy Klair endorsed Chandler's candidacy.¹⁰ Rhea reacted to Wallis' decision by charging that Chandler had bargained with Wallis for his support. Wallis denied these assertions and stated that the reason he was endorsing the election of Chandler was because "Chandler is running on the same platform that I campaigned on preceding the August primary."¹¹

While Chandler received the endorsement of Wallis, Huddleston's support was given to Rhea. Huddleston's decision was made, he stated with:

The conviction that his Rhea's platform will serve the people of Kentucky to a greater advantage than that of his opponent It is my belief that Kentucky will be served more advantageously through Mr. Rhea due to his age, experience and knowledge of governmental affairs. . . .¹²

In their campaign addresses, both Chandler and Rhea dealt again with those questions which had characterized the first primary. But these were overshadowed by two new issues which developed out of the voting in the first primary. They were concerned with the use of National Guardsmen at the polls in Harlan County and the abnormal vote in Logan County. Both issues were beneficial to Chandler's candidacy.

Harlan County, located in the extreme southeastern

¹⁰Harlan Daily Enterprise, August 21, 1935, p. 1.

¹¹Ibid., August 16, 1935, p. 1.

¹²Lexington Herald, August 19, 1935, p. 2.

corner of the state, in the months preceding the election, had been the scene of numerous incidents of violence. These incidents accompanied the attempts of the United Mine Workers' to unionize the coal fields of Eastern Kentucky. To aid local officials in maintaining order, the governor, in early July, had sent Guardsmen to coal companies in Harlan County which had experienced disturbances. These incidents and a previous record of fraudulent elections were used by the Laffoon administration as justification for sending seven hundred troops, under the command of Adjutant General Denhardt, to Harlan County for the purpose of supervising the voting in its seventy-one precincts.¹³

The fact that the troops had been dispatched unannounced the evening before the election aroused widespread criticism. In the days immediately prior to the election, rumors that Guardsmen were going to be sent to the area had been current throughout the state. When questioned about these rumors, members of the Laffoon administration denied them. However, the effectiveness with which the troops were deployed indicated that the operation had been thoroughly thought-out and well-prepared. The Harlan Daily Enterprise noted that:

Every officer in command of the group at each polling place carried large blue print maps of Harlan, probably forty inches square. On this map the final

¹³The Corbin Times, August 3, 1935, p. 1.

precinct destination of each group with the roads leading there, was marked off.¹⁴

In addition, each officer was equipped with the pamphlet signed by the Honest Election League of Harlan County, "which was in fact a set of instructions for the soldiers."¹⁵ Among other things the pamphlet instructed the soldiers to examine all ballot boxes before the polls opened. These pamphlets were distributed to the officers before they reached Harlan.¹⁶

The action of the administration was discredited by the conduct of Adjutant General Denhardt. After learning of the movement of troops into the county, Harlan officials obtained a court injunction forbidding the use of them. Attempts to serve the injunction on Denhardt proved futile until late in the day and then Denhardt ignored it. The situation was made worse when the executive order of the governor authorizing the use of the troops could not be located until after the election weekend.¹⁷

An investigation by an irate Harlan County grand jury in late August disclosed that some of the officers sent to the area had interfered with the voting. "The movement of

¹⁴Harlan Daily Enterprise, August 4, 1935, p. 2.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷During this period Laffoon was in a Lexington hospital recovering from an appendectomy. He insisted that he had signed an executive order, but a twenty-four hour search for it in Frankfort failed to uncover it. Courier-Journal, August 3, 1935, p. 1.

these soldiers," the report of the grand jury declared:

Was an invasion The mobilization of these men and their movement into the county was carried out with all the care, secrecy and completeness of an army meeting a national foe instead of a civilian population in bed and asleep.¹⁸

The report further charged that Laffoon "by holding the order until after the soldiers were in Harlan County and the election over, made himself a party to a movement designed for only one purpose and that to coerce and interfere with and intimidate the voters of Harlan County."¹⁹

The grand jury issued a warrant for Denhardt after he refused to appear before the grand jury's hearings. He was charged with criminal contempt of restraining order. To avoid arrest he remained in hiding for several weeks. This sort of behavior from a public official was subject to serious condemnation. Rhea's candidacy was somewhat tarnished by the fact that Denhardt had been one of Rhea's most active supporters, making numerous speeches on his behalf.

The Laffoon administration's justification in sending the National Guardsmen to Harlan is not being questioned. Nor is the validity of the grand jury's findings being questioned. What is pertinent to this study is that the manner in which the troops were dispatched, the actions of Denhardt, and the widespread publicity which the report of

¹⁸Harlan Daily Enterprise, August 24, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁹Ibid.

the grand jury received all provided Chandler with effective campaign issues.

Chandler struck hard and often at this issue. In his opening address, he described the Harlan situation as "an effort to establish a 'Huey Long' dictatorship over Kentucky," and declared that Governor Laffoon and Rhea were using "Henry 'Hitler' Denhardt to establish their dictatorship."²⁰

On this matter, Rhea assumed a defensive position, maintaining that the troops had been sent into Harlan "to prevent the most unscrupulous election fraud ever perpetrated in the state."²¹ He stated that "the soldiers were sent to Harlan County without my request, consent or knowledge, . . . but the record looks like anybody would have been fully justified in sending them up there."²² Rhea was speaking not only of Harlan's previous election record but also of the voting in the 1935 primary. In many of his speeches, he stressed this by singling out the voting behavior in the Three Point precinct of Harlan County. "The soldiers didn't get there until eight o'clock election morning," Rhea stated, but by that time there had "been cast already four hundred and thirty-seven votes. From eight to four, when the polls closed, only eight more

²⁰Lexington Leader, August 17, 1935, p. 1.

²¹Harlan Daily Enterprise, August 23, 1935, p. 1.

²²Courier-Journal, August 25, 1935, p. 1.

votes were cast."²³

Another issue which arose out of the August primary was that of the unusual vote in Rhea's home county, Logan. Although the total vote of 10,903 did not exceed the county's potential vote of 13,384, Rhea received the largest vote ever given any candidate in the county.²⁴ Up to 1935, the largest vote ever cast in the county had been given to Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932, when he received 7,072 votes. Furthermore, the vote in Logan County surpassed the vote in counties with populations three times that of Logan's. Taking note of these facts and keeping them before the public eye, Chandler and newspapers around the state raised the outcry of election fraud. Rhea responded to these accusations by declaring that he was "proud of the vote given in Logan County."²⁵ He accused the Courier-Journal of trying to make his victory in the county appear "as everything under the sun but what it was — a tribute to me and my policies and my platform."²⁶

Rhea's contention that the Courier-Journal sought to discredit him was undoubtedly correct. But he failed to note that others were also denouncing the vote in Logan County. One paper sarcastically remarked that:

²³Herald Post, August 25, 1935, p. 1.

²⁴Shannon and McQuown, Presidential Politics, p. 117. Rhea received 10,171 votes in Logan County. Jewell, Kentucky Votes, II, 15.

²⁵Courier-Journal, August 24, 1935, p. 3.

²⁶Ibid.

Only the comparatively small population of his native Logan County would seem to have presented Thomas S. Rhea from securing a majority and winning the nomination for Governor in the August primary.²⁷

No evidence has been discovered to substantiate the charges of fraud in the Logan County election. Certainly the fact that Rhea was from the county and was popular there cannot be discounted as a factor in the increase in voting. In many elections, candidates for high office receive a large majority in their home districts. Chandler, in his home county of Woodford, received seventy-four per cent of the vote in the August primary. Of course, there was a substantial difference between Chandler's percentage and the ninety-one per cent Rhea received.

The questionable Logan County vote and the presence of troops in Harlan County provided the candidates with new issues which helped to sustain voter interest. But the old issues, particularly the sales tax, retained its importance in the run-off campaign. Chandler's opposition to the unpopular tax and his pledge to repeal it stood, in the eyes of many voters, in startling contrast to Rhea's defense of it. Chandler's stand on the sales tax is considered by many to be the reason for his victory over Rhea.²⁸ Certainly this was the most important factor in his successful

²⁷Harlan Daily Enterprise, August 8, 1935, p. 2.

²⁸Allan Trout, Elam Huddleston, and Clay W. Bailey all state that it was the issue of the sales tax which defeated Rhea and assured Chandler his victory.

bid for the nomination. It earned him the support of numerous newspapers, the Retail Merchants Association, and much of the general public.

The sales tax controversy combined with the public acclaim Chandler received in calling the special session of the General Assembly enabled Chandler to compete successfully with Rhea who possessed the resources of the administration. In addition to the assistance of the state machinery, Rhea had built up an organization composed of many county officials. Rhea was not a man who had a great deal of popular appeal. Consequently, he relied upon the assistance of a powerful network of local politicians which stretched from county court house to county court house.²⁹ This type of behind-the-scenes organization was largely a product of Rhea's vast experience as a political organizer.

Rhea also received the support of the liquor interests in the state. Many distillers feared that if the sales tax was eliminated, the state would increase the tax on liquor.³⁰ In fact, many in the state legislature had urged this type of revenue measure in place of the sales tax.

Chandler's campaign was not lacking organizational support. He had in Dan Talbot, his campaign manager, one of the most brilliant political organizers in Kentucky.³¹

²⁹Interviews with Trout and Huddleston.

³⁰Urey Woodson to Colonel Hartfield, August 26, 1935, Woodson Papers.

³¹Interview with Allan Trout.

It was Talbot who had engineered Laffoon's nomination and election in 1931. The same skill which he employed in 1931 to carry Laffoon to the governor's chair was used in 1935 to defeat the candidate supported by Laffoon. Starting soon after Chandler announced his candidacy, Talbot visited many counties, contacting men and women who could lead Chandler's campaign in local areas.³² Although he was not able to set up organizations in each county by August, he had, by the time of the run-off primary, established a Chandler group in each of the one hundred twenty counties in the state. The majority of the workers in Talbot's organization were young and politically inexperienced, for most of the veteran workers had aligned themselves with Rhea.³³ This had proved an asset to Rhea in the first primary. However, at the same time Talbot's men had gained valuable training in the August primary and were able to render Chandler more assistance in the run-off contest. Furthermore, the inexperience of many of Chandler's workers was offset by the advantage he commanded through his stand on the sales tax and primary issues.

In run-off campaign both candidates demonstrated an increased interest in labor's vote. On one occasion Rhea recalled that he always supported labor and pledged his continued support to the laboring men and women.³⁴ He

³²Courier-Journal, November 10, 1935, p. 12.

³³Baylor, Lan Talbot, p. 325.

³⁴The Sun Democrat, September 3, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

further pledged that "if the scales of justice between capital and labor are unbalanced, I will do my utmost to balance them when I become Governor."³⁵ Chandler made similar appeals but placed greater stress on his own experience as a laborer.³⁶ Despite the increased concern of the candidates, organized labor still did not endorse either man.

After the August primary, many of Rhea's supporters had confidently predicted that the turn-out for the run-off primary would be much smaller than that of the August election. However, the size of the crowds which attended the candidates' appearances tended to discredit the idea that interest in the nomination was diminishing after the first primary. The record-breaking attendances at political meetings were explained by the Rhea forces as curiosity and by the Chandler forces as a sign of victory. The explanation of the latter group would prove to be more valid.

Despite the predictions of the Rhea forces, almost forty-five thousand more Democrats voted in September primary than had voted in the first primary. Combined, the vote of the two candidates totaled 494,697.³⁷ Chandler, receiving 260,573 votes, increased his August vote by some 80,998 votes. On the other hand, Rhea gained only 31,114

³⁵Ibid.

³⁶Courier-Journal, August 31, 1935, p. 2.

³⁷Jewell, Kentucky Votes, II, 17.

votes, finishing with a total of 234,124.³⁸

Chandler made fewest gains in votes in Eastern Kentucky which remained staunchly pro-Rhea. However, he did pick up Knott, Lee and Powell counties. In the Bluegrass region, he made substantial gains. From Rhea he picked up Clark and Robertson counties and from the other three candidates he took Fayette, Madison and Bourbon counties. His greatest gains came in the Owensboro-Henderson and Jackson Purchase areas. By slim margins, Union, McLean and Daviess counties aligned themselves for the first time with Chandler.³⁹ In the Jackson Purchase region, he took Calloway County from Rhea and picked up McCracken and Marshall counties which had been carried earlier by the three minor candidates. A factor in Chandler increase in this region was the Wallis vote which had been strongest in the Jackson Purchase area. Chandler also made inroads into Rhea's home territory, carrying Caldwell, Christian, Simpson and Barren counties. Other counties gained by Chandler included Clinton, Pulaski, and Gallatin counties. In all, Chandler carried fourteen counties which had been carried by Rhea in the August primary. Of this number, eleven were carried by Chandler with less than a 16% increase in his vote. Thus, many of the counties gained by Chandler had given him substantial votes in the first primary.

The division between the wealthy and poor counties

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid.

persisted in the run-off primary. Of those counties with property values from one to twenty dollars per acre, Chandler carried eighteen and Rhea thirty-five.⁴⁰ There were thirty-nine counties with property values ranging from twenty to forty dollars per acre. Of this number, Chandler carried twenty-eight and Rhea eleven. The division becomes more marked in those counties with property values over forty dollars. Rhea carried two of these counties and Chandler twenty-six. Chandler's increase in the number of wealthy counties was due to his gains in the rich Bluegrass region.

The Negro voting in the run-off primary changed somewhat from that of the first primary. Counties with small Negro population were fairly evenly divided between the two candidates. For instance, of those with a Negro population of under six per cent, Rhea carried thirty-five and Chandler thirty-three.⁴¹ Rhea carried ten counties with Negro population of from six to fifteen per cent, while Chandler carried thirty-two. Of the counties with Negro populations of over fifteen per cent, five were carried by Chandler and three by Rhea. Thus, again Chandler took a greater percentage of those counties with the largest Negro population. Most of these counties are located in the Western Kentucky, and in the Louisville and Bluegrass regions. Much of Chandler strength was concentrated in these areas,

⁴⁰U. S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census, Agriculture, I, 16-25.

⁴¹Ibid., Population Characteristics, pp. 211-34.

FIGURE II
RUN-OFF PRIMARY
COUNTY VOTE DISTRIBUTION

Campus Book Store-Lexington Ky.

Counties carried by Chandler

Counties carried by Rhea

and the Negro vote must have contributed to this. However, as in the earlier primary campaign, no appeal was made directly on racial grounds. More important was the fact that Western Kentucky had been the hotbed of anti-administration sentiment. Furthermore, opposition to the sales tax was strong in the Bluegrass region and it was Chandler's home.

After more than six months of intensive campaigning by candidates, the Democratic Party had finally chosen its gubernatorial nominee. The rest of Chandler's ticket was also nominated, except for J. M. Wise, the candidate for lieutenant governor. Although Rhea lost the election, his running mate, Keen Johnson, received the nomination for lieutenant governor.⁴² Johnson avoided as much as possible the intra-party fighting. In addition, he had built a powerful political organization in the central part of the state which aided him tremendously. Furthermore, Johnson had a great deal of support in Louisville.

The results of the run-off election signaled the end of the career of a man who had long been a powerful figure in Kentucky politics. For the other candidate the victory signaled the ascendancy of one of the most colorful and skillful politicians in the state's history.

Chandler's victory cannot be explained solely in terms of the controversy over the sales tax and the direct

⁴²Manuscript records of elections, Office of Secretary of State, Frankfort, Kentucky. Johnson received 186,898 votes and Wise 156,549 votes.

primary. Just as important in his victory was his personality and character. Chandler represented the new type of leader which emerged during the trying 1930's.⁴³ These new leaders contrasted sharply with the old-type leadership, "a type which arose after the Civil War and dominated Kentucky politics for half a century."⁴⁴ This type has been called the "oratorical school of political leadership."⁴⁵ As a member of this school, Rhea was often given to the "eloquent phrases and perfume scented oratory."⁴⁶

The new type of leadership arose with issues and problems never before faced by Americans. These problems, for the most part, were woven around economic and social conditions such as unemployment, care for the aged and agricultural relief. Representative of this type, Chandler spoke in a "dynamic and hard-hitting, wise-cracking, non-florid" manner which was popular with many people.⁴⁷

In addition, to the popularity of his political ideas and the courage of his speech and actions, on the rostrum he appeared an earnest and understanding person, and one whose energy and strength could solve many problems.⁴⁸ Besides these qualities, Chandler possessed a pleasing

⁴³Interviews with Bailey I, and Trout.

⁴⁴Shannon, Political Behavior in Kentucky, p. 7.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Interview with Bailey, I.

personality; one which "exuded a wealth of geniality and good feeling in his personal contacts with the voters."⁴⁹

Chandler's congenial personality and ready smile were the source of much criticism by his opponents. For example, one paper described him as:

A rollicking, personally likable young man, a good mixer and entertainer of the "hailfellow well met" variety, Mr. Chandler perhaps would have found greater success in the role of public entertainer than in politics. He has undoubtedly strong appeal to the good will of a large following who do not trouble to look underneath the surface froth.⁵⁰

Despite the sentiments of that paper, a majority of Democratic voters demonstrated the belief that they had seen "beneath the froth" an ability greater than that possessed by the other candidates. Before final victory was achieved, this ability would be demonstrated again.

⁴⁹Hamilton Tapp and Frederick A. Wallis, A Sesqui-Centennial History of Kentucky (Hopkinsville: Historical Record Association, 1945), II, p. 749.

⁵⁰The Glasgow Republican, October 31, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

CHAPTER V

THE GUBERNATORIAL CAMPAIGN

While the Democrats were engaged in the run-off campaign, the Republican candidate had remained relatively quiet. Many Republicans believed that if Swope were not active, the factionalism in the Democratic Party would be intensified. Some Republicans contended that the bitterness which characterized the Rhea-Chandler contest would prevent the winner from receiving the full support of Democratic voters in November. As early as July 10, one Republican newspaper had remarked:

Which ever way the Democratic nomination goes, it seems likely that the winner will be unable to command the entire support of the Democratic voters. At least a partial split in the Democratic Party appears almost inevitable considering the steadily growing heat of the gubernatorial campaigns of the candidates Judge Swope and the entire Republican ticket cannot but profit from the internal strife which seems likely to develop in the Democratic Party.¹

Other Republicans, while recognizing that some defection might result from the fighting in the Democratic Party, argued that the intense nature of the Democratic contest was generating interest among people who generally did not vote. This increased interest, it was feared,

¹Casey County News, July 10, 1935, clipping in the Swope Scrapbooks.

would produce a large Democratic vote. One Republican paper went so far as to decry the fact that the Republican campaign was developing with "less noise and recrimination than characterized the Democratic Party."²

Before and after the run-off primary, Swope criticized severely the factionalism within the Democratic Party.

"Lashed by the scorpion of factionalism and stung by the adder of partisanship," the Republican candidate stated that "Kentucky presents a pitiful and appalling picture of political servitude and degradation."³ In most of his speeches, Swope made it clear that in his opinion little difference existed between the two factions. He argued that they were both corrupt and both determined to dominate state politics.

The Republican candidate did more than criticize the strife within the opposing party. In the opening address of his gubernatorial campaign, Swope announced his platform.⁴ Concerned about education in the state, Swope pledged to expand the free textbook program and the entire educational system. On the financial side, he promised to reduce the state debt by discontinuing the issuance of interest bearing warrants, assess property owners every two years instead of annually, and oppose the re-enactment of the sales tax.

²Central Record, July 11, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

³Harlan Daily Enterprise, September 26, 1935, p. 1.

⁴Lexington Herald, September 22, 1935, p. 1.

He further stated that he would remove the spoils system from the state's charity and correctional institutions. Finally, he said that if elected he would call for a constitutional change which would permit counties to consolidate and city and county governments to merge.⁵

Opening his campaign seven days after Swope, Chandler charged that the Republican candidate had adopted most of his platform. Only on two points, Chandler alleged, was there any disagreement, and he continually emphasized these differences. The Democratic nominee asserted that he and Swope differed on the primary question, implying that Swope had indicated a preference for the convention system. Actually Swope had only expressed opposition to run-off primaries.

The other area of major disagreement in the platforms of the two candidates became one of the principal issues in the gubernatorial campaign. In his opening speech, Swope had stated: "If elected I will appoint a non-political highway commission."⁶ In later addresses, Swope extended the pledge of non-political rule to other areas of the state government. Chandler immediately accused Swope of returning the state to bi-partisan rule. "I on't let Swope tell you," asserted Chandler, "there is any such thing as a

⁵Copy of Republican platform 1935: King Swope Collection, Archives Division, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky.

⁶Lexington Herald, September 22, 1935, p. 1.

non-partisan party in Kentucky."⁷ Chandler compared Swope's pledge of a non-political government to the type of bi-partisan government which had dominated the state before the election of Laffoon, and charged that the group which had formed the Combine was backing Swope.⁸ Chandler's assertions were not completely accurate as many of his own supporters, such as Ben Johnson and Billy Klair, had been leaders in the Bi-Partisan Combine.

The Democratic candidate also charged that Swope's promise of a non-political administration was fostered by a "bargain" with Rhea and his supporters. He declared that Swope had "traded Republicans out of his bi-partisanship . . . and betrayed them by promising the jobs to the bi-partisan combine."⁹ Swope consistently denied these accusations, stating that he sought in his advocacy of non-political management of the state, not bi-partisan government, but a more efficient and less costly government. This would be achieved through the appointment of "men who are outstanding in their qualifications" ¹⁰

Despite denials by Swope, later events seemed to vindicate Chandler's charges that some sort of political agreement had been made with the Rhea forces. The results

⁷Courier-Journal, October 19, 1935, p. 2.

⁸Ibid., October 20, 1935, p. 12.

⁹Morehead Independent, October 10, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

¹⁰Courier-Journal, September 22, 1935, p. 1.

of the run-off primary had hardly been announced when political observers began to project a "party bolt" by the Rhea forces. This speculation was given credence by several incidents. The first occurred when Rhea failed to congratulate Chandler on his victory in the run-off primary. Then on September 12, lengthy conferences were held by Governor Laffoon, Thomas Rhea, Keen Johnson, and Earle Clements, Rhea's campaign manager.¹¹ From these conferences there emerged rumors and reports of a possible bolt. Finally, speculation was aroused by Laffoon's and Rhea's conspicuous absence from Chandler's opening rally.

The threat of a party bolt was given a great deal of attention in spite of repeated assertions of party loyalty made by Rhea during the two primary campaigns. In the closing days of the run-off campaign, Rhea had declared:

I told you in my opening speech, June 8 at Bowling Green, that I would do nothing in this campaign to hurt my party in November . . . I have not changed from that day to this. I love my party more than the office I seek. And, if you should make the mistake of nominating my opponent I will be out there fighting for him in November just like I fought for forty years.¹²

Evidence of a possible bolt accumulated during September, but Rhea and Laffoon refused to comment on the subject. Then on October 7, a dinner was given in Louisville in Rhea's honor. Present at the dinner were many

¹¹Harlan Daily Enterprise, September 12, 1935, p. 1.

¹²Ibid., September 1, 1935, p. 4.

state officials, some of whom were wearing Swope buttons.¹³ Needless to say, this increased the speculation.

Eleven days after the dinner in Louisville, the governor delivered a speech in Northern Kentucky, in which he sharply assailed Chandler's candidacy, and expressed the hope that the people of Kentucky "would not be fooled by the 'clap-trap' of Chandler and his supporters."¹⁴ In this speech, Laffoon gave public notice of his opposition to Chandler's candidacy, but he did not endorse the candidacy of the Republican nominee. In a move that surprised few, Laffoon announced in a speech at Prestonburg on October 29, that he would vote for the entire Democratic ticket except Chandler. Laffoon defended his action by declaring:

When a Democrat tries to wreck a Democratic administration he is not entitled to support. Mr. Chandler and his gang have done all they could against my administration. For that reason I am not going to support Mr. Chandler.¹⁵

Rhea went a step further than the Governor. In a radio address, on the day before the general election, Rhea repudiated his primary pledge to support the Democratic nominee and endorsed King Swope's candidacy. Rhea denied that he had been motivated by any sort of political deal with the Republican nominee. Speaking of his pledge to support the party nominee and the reasons for his action,

¹³Courier-Journal, October 8, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁴Cincinnati Enquirer, October 19, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁵Lexington Herald, October 30, 1935, p. 1.

he stated:

This promise was not made because of any belief in the platform of the present nominee, but because of my belief in the principles of the Democratic Party. This promise was made in good faith and without knowledge of some tactics my opponent employed in the second primary, which are obnoxious to any man, and wholly inexcusable. His tactics and conduct are not such that his election would be a Democratic victory; but it would have been such as would discredit any party.¹⁶

Rhea did not elaborate upon the principles he believed that Chandler had affronted nor did he explain completely what tactics he had used. Some vague references were made by Rhea to the effect that the Chandler organization had in some way mistreated his family, but he refused to explain in what manner this occurred. Rhea did specifically accuse Chandler of circulating, in Catholic communities, a statement which pointed out that Ben Johnson, Dan Talbot, Percy Haly, and Billy Klair were all Catholics. The circular, Rhea said, ended with the question: "What chance have the Protestants to get recognition with this line-up?"¹⁷ Such statements he asserted had cost him many Catholic votes. Without referring to Rhea by name, Chandler denounced the injection of the religious issue as being "beneath the dignity of an answer."¹⁸

¹⁶Courier-Journal, November 5, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁷Cincinnati Enquirer, November 5, 1935, p. 1.

¹⁸Courier-Journal, November 5, 1935, p. 1.

On the basis of the evidence available at this time, it is impossible to state positively whether a mutually beneficial agreement had been arranged between Rhea and the Republican candidate. This type of alliance was not uncommon in Kentucky's history and it is very possible that such an agreement was made between Rhea and Swope.¹⁹ Although no evidence has been uncovered to implicate either person, Swope did receive the aid of some of Rhea's organization. In a letter written to Swope's wife on October 15, 1935, the fact is disclosed that Earle Clements, Rhea's campaign manager, was actively assisting the Swope campaign in Clements' home district.²⁰ It seems highly improbable that Rhea was not at least aware of this assistance, and that he did not give at least an indirect nod of assent. However, none of this is conclusive proof that an agreement was made between the Republican candidate and the defeated Democratic aspirant.

A personal vendetta would seem to be a logical explanation for Rhea's bolt and some attributed his action to this motive. Rhea, seemingly assured of the nomination a few months before, had seen a man, much younger than himself, snatch from his hands a prize he had been seeking for twenty years. This would be enough to embitter many persons. But the vendetta theory is apparently contradicted

¹⁹Interview with Trout.

²⁰Joseph Cambron to Mary Swope, October 15, 1935, Swope Collection.

in a letter by Rhea to an old friend and political advisor. In this letter, Rhea, in a philosophical manner, stated:

Of course I was disappointed at the result of the final primary, but such is life and I am proud to belong to a race able to bear with perfect equanimity any adversity as it comes.²¹

This letter does not negate entirely the possibility that Rhea simply sought revenge, but it does suggest that Rhea had not been so embittered by the results of the primary contests that he struck out at Chandler blindly and without reason.

The possibility that Rhea was truly concerned about the well-being of the party cannot be discounted. His association with the Democratic Party had been a long and ardent one. Thus, he may have convinced himself, after suffering a heart breaking defeat, that he was acting in the welfare of the party.

Whether Rhea acted out of animosity, concern for the party, or because of a political bargain, his "last hour bolt," as one influential politician aptly stated it, "destroyed all of his political usefulness."²² Never again would he possess the power and influence that was his during the Laffoon administration.

The effect of the "bolt" on the voting of any large segment of the population is questionable. The defection

²¹Thomas Rhea to Urey Woodson, September 23, 1935, Woodson Papers.

²²Urey Woodson to Colonel Hartfield, November 30, 1935, Woodson Papers.

of Rhea supporters to the side of Swope was not universal. Many of the county politicians, around whom Rhea had built his primary organization, sensed the popular support given Chandler and did not follow the lead of Laffoon or Rhea. As Chandler traveled around the state campaigning, many of the men who had formerly aligned themselves with Rhea were observed to be sitting with Chandler on the speakers platform and many publicly endorsed Chandler.²³ The party bolt was further handicapped by the lack of a strong leader. Laffoon never endorsed Swope directly and Rhea delayed until the day before the election. The last hour endorsement of Swope came too late to produce a large defection within the party.

The Rhea bolt did not develop without attempts at conciliation. These efforts, because of the source from which they originated, only served to intensify the differences between the two factions and provide the Republican candidate with an issue. It will be recalled that the national administration had taken an active interest in the action of the Democratic Executive Committee prior to its calling of a convention, a step opposed by the Roosevelt Administration. This interest was generated by the fact that the New Deal faced its first major election test in 1936. Kentucky, as the only state in the union holding a major election in 1935, was marked by both Democratic and Republican national leaders as a crucial battle

²³Courier-Journal, October 20, 1935, p. 14.

ground. A Democratic victory in Kentucky's gubernatorial election would be viewed as an endorsement of the Roosevelt policies. Likewise, the Republicans sought to use a victory as an indication of public rejection of the New Deal programs. Frustrating the desires of Democrats at the national level was the fact that the ranks of Kentucky's party were divided by factional fighting.

During the primary campaigns Rhea had accused the Roosevelt administration of favoring Chandler. Even if Rhea was correct in his assertions, it was extremely impolitic to state them publicly, for the national administration was generally considered to be popular in the state.²⁴ Rhea asserted that the attitude of the national administration was the product of misleading and false information given by Bingham and his followers. Rhea argued that the Roosevelt administration's support of the anti-administration group in Kentucky had been demonstrated by the appointment of John Y. Brown, an avowed anti-administration supporter, to a federal position.²⁵ Rhea's assertions were given added weight when Brown, speaking on behalf of Chandler's candidacy, stated repeatedly that he knew that the President did not want Rhea nominated and that if the President were a resident of

²⁴Urey Woodson to Homer Cummings, August 14, 1935, Woodson Papers.

²⁵Lexington Herald, April 14, 1935, p. 4.

Kentucky he would vote against Rhea's nomination.²⁶

Rhea was particularly resentful about the action of the national administration because of what appeared to him to be the ingratitude of the Roosevelt group. It had been largely the work of Rhea which won the vote of the Kentucky delegation for Roosevelt in the 1932 nominating convention. While Rhea had been a active supporter of Roosevelt, Dan Talbot, Ben Johnson and Chandler had supported Al Smith and opposed Roosevelt's nomination. In spite of their opposition, Rhea, with the aid of Laffoon and others, succeeded in securing a delegation which was instructed for Roosevelt.²⁷ Afterwards, at the Chicago convention, Chandler and Talbot once again worked to defeat Roosevelt's nomination. However, Rhea successfully held the Kentucky delegation in line for the future President.²⁸

After the run-off primary, the national administration expressed more openly its interest in the election. Immediately after the election, Chandler visited Washington, where he was promised the aid of the national party by its chairman, Postmaster General James Farley.²⁹ To assist Chandler in his campaign Farley visited Louisville on

²⁶Urey Woodson to Colonel Hartfield, September 28, 1935, Woodson Papers.

²⁷Urey Woodson to James A. Farley, February 2, 1935, Woodson Papers.

²⁸Urey Woodson to Daniel Roper, July 12, 1935, Woodson Papers.

²⁹Courier-Journal, September 17, 1935, p. 1.

October 5. While in the city Farley, addressing the Young Democrats, urged unity within the state's Democratic Party during the gubernatorial campaign and stressed the importance of the Kentucky election in the eyes of political observers at the national level.³⁰

Farley's trip was made on the heels of a disastrous attempt at conciliation by the President of the United States. The President, on September 27, embarked on a transcontinental tour of the country. The evening before departing, in an effort to soothe dissension, he had invited Rhea, Laffoon and Chandler to ride with him on his train from Cincinnati to North Vernon, Indiana. The President's invitation was refused by both Rhea and Laffoon. In sending the request to the Governor, the President's secretary, Marvin McIntyre, a Kentuckian and one of those accused of transmitting false information to the President, had not included the Governor's name, simply stating that the President invites "you, Chandler and Rhea to board the train."³¹ Laffoon declared that he had not been invited and refused to go even after McIntyre attempted to appease Laffoon by personally phoning an invitation.

One newspaper stated that Rhea in replying to the invitation indicated:

That since the President had closed
the door of the White House to him

³⁰Ibid., October 6, 1935, p. 1.

³¹Cincinnati Enquirer, September 28, 1935, p. 4.

for seven months, he saw no reason why he should come to Ohio to greet Mr. Roosevelt.³²

He further asserted that the President's mind had been poisoned against him by his Kentucky-born secretary.³³

Only Chandler accepted the invitation, but his meeting with the President occurred with much confusion and disorder. The whole meeting took on aspects of a situation comedy. As Chandler rushed to meet the President's train he accidentally ran into a policeman "who not recognizing this slim and very young man as even so much as a constable, much less a prospective governor, refused to let him pass."³⁴ While Chandler was being detained, the President and other dignitaries were posed for the traditional hearty greeting given to fellow party members. By the time Chandler had been identified to the satisfaction of the policemen, the President, who had waited with anxious reporters for almost a half an hour, had returned to his private car.³⁵ Thus, the President's role as peacemaker had not only failed to foster an accord, but had accentuated the split beyond the hope of healing.

³²Ibid.

³³Urey Woodson to Colonel Hartfield, September 28, 1935; Colonel Hartfield to Urey Woodson, September 30, 1935, Woodson Papers. In this exchange of letters both men agree that Rhea had basis for his feelings. Woodson states that McIntyre had been boasting a few months earlier that Rhea would not be elected if nominated.

³⁴Cincinnati Enquirer, September 28, 1935, p. 4.

³⁵Ibid.

The Roosevelt administration also endeavored through indirect measures to aid the Democratic nominee. A few days before the general election, it was disclosed that letters of solicitation had been mailed to beneficiaries of federal relief funds in Kentucky. Sent from Washington, these letters tactfully advised their recipients that the continuation of New Deal benefits depended upon the election of Chandler.³⁶ This type of activity, which became notorious in the 1938 senatorial campaign between Chandler and Barkley, does not appear to have been used extensively in 1935. One reason for this was that the federal relief agencies were not sufficiently organized in 1935 to exercise a great deal of power.³⁷

Swope, on learning of the letters, charged that the federal authorities were trying to coerce Kentucky relief clients into voting for Chandler.³⁸ The effect of the letters on voters who received them is impossible to ascertain. The effect of their disclosure on the voting of the general public was probably negligible because of the late date on which they were made public.

The Roosevelt administration aided Chandler's candidacy in yet another way. The Democratic nominee possessed an asset in the popularity of the New Deal and

³⁶Ibid., November 4, 1935, p. 1.

³⁷Interview with Trout.

³⁸Herald Post, November 2, 1935, p. 1.

the President in the state. In his campaign addresses, he noted often the importance of his election to the Roosevelt program. He warned all Democrats that if Swope was elected "he would be working all next year to breakdown the Roosevelt Administration."³⁹ That would mean, Chandler stated, "the obstruction of social security and old-age pension legislation in Kentucky."⁴⁰

Republicans, recognizing the advantage the Democrats enjoyed in the popularity of the national administration, sought to avoid the topic of the New Deal. "Kentucky needs a change. State issues are the only issues that should be discussed," one Republican paper declared.⁴¹ Adhering to this strategy, Swope confined his remarks to state problems and issues. The only issue he might have been able to use against the Roosevelt administration was that of the letters to the relief clients. But it developed too late in the campaign to be employed effectively by the Republican candidate.

Swope also sought to make an issue out of Chandler's assessment of state employees. During the primary campaigns the Democratic nominee had repeatedly accused Rhea of assessing state employees for campaign funds. Most voters, accustomed to this practice, gave little heed to

³⁹Courier-Journal, October 2, 1935, p. 2.

⁴⁰Lexington Herald, October 27, 1935, p. 3.

⁴¹The Messenger, September 22, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

Chandler's assertions.⁴² After securing the nomination in the run-off primary, Chandler, in need of funds, also solicited from those on the state's payroll what were termed "contributions." His efforts at assessment might have viewed in the same philosophical manner, except for two things. The first factor to discredit Chandler's activities was the publication on September 6, of a report by the office of the State Examiner and Inspector which dealt with the costly mismanagement of the State Highway Department. On the basis of a complete audit of the department's expenditures during the period from April, 1931 to April 1, 1935, the report asserted that:

The policy of using the highway department as a political machine during the last fifteen years undoubtedly has cost the state many millions of dollars that might have been applied under a more efficient non-political system of operations, to the building and maintenance of hundreds of miles more of needed roads throughout the state.⁴³

The report indicated that highway department had become the center of assessment activities.

Chandler's activities in this area were made even more damaging by the fact that throughout the primary contests he had repeatedly promised that if elected he would urge the passage of a law "forbidding the use of taxpayers' money for political purposes."⁴⁴ Commenting on

⁴²Interview with Trout.

⁴³Courier-Journal, September 7, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁴Ibid., July 12, 1935, p. 11.

Chandler's contradictory behavior, one paper stated: "Mr. Chandler condemned and pledged himself against a practice he knew was a common custom in politics. If he saw fit to commit himself against it, he should have stuck by his commitment."⁴⁵

Swope denounced Chandler's action, implying that he was a man whose word could not be trusted and thus was not fit to be governor. Swope's denunciations were highlighted by the publication of some of the letters sent out by the Chandler organization. These letters noted the organization's urgent need for financial resources. They did point out that Chandler had announced a policy "opposing the levying upon officials and employees of the state for campaign funds," but concluded with the statement that:

We are confident that your interest in the success of the State Democratic ticket in November is such that you will be glad to share in the burden of this campaign...⁴⁶

The letters also reminded the recipients that the custom was for employees and officials to contribute "at least two per cent of their annual salary."⁴⁷

Chandler answered Swope by drawing attention to that part of the letter which noted his opposition to assessment. Frederick Wallis, who had become Chandler's finance chairman and mailed the letters, issued a statement in

⁴⁵Herald Post, October 27, 1935, p. 4.

⁴⁶A. B. Chandler to Jeanne Searcy, Swope Collection.

⁴⁷Ibid.

which he declared that the solicitations were not assessments because they were not compulsory.⁴⁸ Chandler also tried to offset Swope's charges by asserting that attempts were being made to assess employees of the highway department for the benefit of Swope.⁴⁹ Although Swope denounced Chandler's accusations as "an infamous and deliberate falsehood,"⁵⁰ such action would have been normal if an agreement had been reached between Rhea and the Republican nominee.⁵¹

Federal involvement in the election and the controversy over the assessment of state employees highlighted the gubernatorial election, which lacked the excitement of the Democratic primaries. Little real difference existed in the platforms of the two candidates. Swope did attempt to turn the sales tax issue to his own advantage by declaring that Chandler had ignored an opportunity to repeal the sales tax when he had called the special session of the General Assembly. Chandler in turn held Swope accountable for the support given the sales tax by Republicans in the legislature. Based on little more than thin air, these charges aroused little public interest.

Both candidates engaged in hard-fought campaigns. "Chandler delivered one hundred and three speeches in

⁴⁸Lexington Herald, October 23, 1935, p. 1.

⁴⁹Cincinnati Enquirer, October 23, 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁰Lexington Leader, October 24, 1935, p. 1.

⁵¹Interview with Trout.

seventy-two counties while Swope delivered ninety speeches in eighty-two counties."⁵² Swope and the Democratic candidate differed sharply in their approach to public addresses. Swope generally spoke longer than Chandler and in a more concise and logical manner than the Democratic nominee. A more flamboyant speaker, Chandler's delivery was less formal.

The campaign did not lack the jesting which is a part of many political contests. Chandler, in allusion to Swope's given name, referred to the Republican nominee on many occasions as "his majesty, the king." Stating that he knew Chandler would "pull that one," Swope humorously returned Chandler's political barb by declaring:

You know that every court has some good-natured simpleton around to laugh, dance and sing. When I'm elected Governor I will let him entertain one and all with his song and dances.⁵³

The gubernatorial campaign ended on the evening of November 4, 1935. Election day dawned rainy and overcast across the state. Although inclement weather is usually a precursor of a small vote, this was not the case in 1935, when over a million voters went to the polls to express their sentiments. This was the largest vote ever cast in Kentucky's history. Winning the election, Chandler received a vote of 556,262, whereas Swope received 461,104.

⁵²Courier-Journal, November 3, 1935, p. 1.

⁵³Lexington Leader, October 6, 1935, p. 1.

As is indicated in the illustration on the following page, Chandler received majorities in seventy-seven counties and Swope in forty-three counties. Chandler's strength was concentrated primarily in a large part of the Bluegrass, and in Western, Northern and Southeastern Kentucky. Of course, the Bluegrass region and Western Kentucky had always been centers of Democratic strength. The Democratic Party had made inroads into Southeastern Kentucky in the early years of the depression. Many of the counties in this area, such as Leslie and Perry, had a traditional attachment to the Republican Party. Chandler's candidacy in the region was aided by the United Mine Workers and the popularity of the New Deal. On October 10, the president of Kentucky's union had in announcing the endorsement of Chandler stated:

Chandler was endorsed because of the friendly attitude of President Roosevelt and the national administration toward labor throughout the nation and also because of Chandler's record on labor legislation while he served in the state senate and as lieutenant governor.⁵⁴

It was also stated that Swope "was unfriendly to organized labor and that while a member of the Sixty-Sixth Congress he consistently voted against and opposed labor measures."⁵⁵ On behalf of Chandler's candidacy, John L. Lewis, national president of the United Mine Workers of America, came to

⁵⁴Lexington Herald, October 8, 1935, p. 1.

⁵⁵Ibid.

FIGURE III
GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION
COUNTY VOTE DISTRIBUTION

Compos Both State-Geological Map

- Counties carried by Swope
- Counties carried by Chandler

Kentucky, much of the northeastern region and in a number of counties in the Pennyroyal region. He also picked up some support in the Bluegrass region, principally in his home county of Fayette. Actually, Swope did much better than had the Republican candidate in the 1931 gubernatorial election. He carried eleven counties which the 1931 candidate did not carry and lost only seven of those carried by the Republican candidate that year. Furthermore, he picked up sixteen counties lost by Hoover in 1932 and lost only one. For the most part, Swope carried those regions, such as South-Central Kentucky, which were traditional Republican areas.

By and large, Chandler carried the wealthy counties in the state. Of those with property values of less than twenty dollars per acre, Chandler carried twenty and Swope thirty-one.⁶⁰ The Democratic nominee's strength in the wealthier regions of the state is demonstrated by the fact that of the counties with property values ranging from twenty to fifty dollars per acre Chandler carried forty-two and Swope eight. Likewise, Chandler carried sixteen counties with property values over fifty dollars per acre, whereas Swope carried three.⁶¹ This type of distribution was not uncommon, for Republican strength in the state rested in many of the poorer regions. This had been one

⁶⁰U. S. Census Bureau, 1940 Census: Agriculture, I,
16-25.

⁶¹Ibid.

factor in Swope's denunciation of the use of federal relief rolls by the Chandler forces. It was feared that this influence would be greatest on those counties which had the greatest proportion of the population as recipients of governmental relief.⁶² This was not borne out in the 1935 election. Instead of repudiating their Republicanism many counties gave Swope a greater percentage of their votes than they had given the 1932 Republican presidential candidate. For example, in Jackson County the vote rose from 84.5 per cent Republican to 88.8 per cent. Increases were also found in Leslie, Laurel, Casey, Martin, McCreary, Metcalfe, Monroe, Owsley, and Russell counties. A decrease in Republican votes came primarily in those counties such as Harlan, Letcher and Perry where the voting was affected by union membership.

The 1935 election did not differ from earlier and later elections in the state during the 1930's. One writer has pointed out that "in eight statewide elections from 1930 to 1940 eighty-seven counties, or 72.5 per cent of all the 120 counties in Kentucky followed their normal party pattern in every instance."⁶³ However, the depression had altered voting in the coal areas and in the urban areas. In the former some party change was made and in the latter the Democratic Party found its greatest support. Chandler carried all of the metropolitan centers except for the

⁶²Shannon, A Decade of Change, p. 5.

⁶³Ibid., p. 4.

Lexington area, which supported its favorite son, the Republican candidate.

Negro voting does not appear to have been extremely significant in the election. In over half of the counties in the state Negroes made up less than five per cent of the population. Of these Chandler and Swope each carried thirty-two. However, of those counties with Negro populations of over five per cent Chandler carried forty-two and Swope only ten. This rightly indicates that the Democratic candidate received greater support in those areas which contained a large number of Negroes. But this does not necessarily indicate that a switch had occurred in Negro voting as a result of the New Deal. In Kentucky, the Democratic Party's strength had been located in regions such as the central Bluegrass and Jackson Purchase areas which had fairly large Negro populations. On the other hand, a great deal of Republican strength lay in areas with smaller Negro populations. Thirteen counties altered their traditional voting patterns in 1935. Of this number only five had Negro populations of over five per cent. Two of these counties, Madison and Taylor, were carried by Swope. However, there is one thing which suggests that the Democratic Party increased its support among Negroes as early as 1931. The county which had the largest percentage of Negro population was Christian with 30.4 per cent. From the time of Reconstruction to 1931 the county had consistently voted Republican. But in 1931 and in 1935 the

county went Democratic. This indicates that the New Deal and the Depression had possibly effected a change in Negro voting in the state. It thus appears that the Negro vote was probably of greatest benefit to the Democratic candidate.

Chandler's victory was the result of many factors. One angry Republican paper unrealistically charged that the G. O. P. lost because its members failed to face "the issue." "This issue," the paper asserted, "was the administration of Governor Laffoon with all its failures and its mistakes, and the New Deal at Washington."⁶⁴ This writer failed to admit, or perhaps recognize that Swope faced overwhelming obstacles in his campaign to win the election.

The greatest obstacle he faced with the belief that somehow Republicans were responsible for the depression. What was worse for him was that he had to fight this idea in a state that was predominantly Democratic. Related to this was the fact that Roosevelt and the New Deal were extremely popular in the state. With the support of the national administration, Chandler became the recipient of much of this popular support.

Connected with the New Deal were two proposed amendments to the state constitution. The first amendment to be voted on was one which would permit the legislature to enact legislation to provide for old-age pensions. Since

⁶⁴Mt. Sterling Gazette and Kentucky Courier, November 8, 1935, clipping in Swope Scrapbooks.

both candidates endorsed the amendment, there was little controversy raised over the issue. However, great interest was shown in the proposal by the older citizens in the state who turned out in large numbers on election day to vote on the amendment.⁶⁵

The other amendment submitted to the people dealt with the question of whether the state would remove or retain its prohibition amendment to state constitution. In 1919, when the prohibition cause was at its peak, Kentucky had adopted a prohibition amendment to its Constitution. When prohibition was abolished nationally, Kentucky's legislature voted to submit to the people the question of whether the state's dry amendment should be retained. Although neither candidate publicly expressed his sentiment on the subject, interest was aroused by the campaigning of opponents and proponents of the measure. Both the old-age amendment and that dealing with prohibition were factors in the large vote in the general election.⁶⁶

Chandler's victory was also, in a large measure, a personal victory. He possessed great popular appeal for Kentuckians in the 1930's. His opposition to the sales tax had earned him many supporters. And his action in calling the special session of the legislature to enact a primary

⁶⁵Urey Woodson to Samuel Blythe, November 6, 1935, Woodson Papers.

⁶⁶Courier-Journal, November 8-9, 1935, p. 1. The vote on the prohibition amendment was 376,118 for and 285,140 against. The old-age amendment was passed with a 600,000 majority.

law made him a proven man of action. In both of these fights, Chandler appeared as the champion of popular government and the poor.

Of great importance in Chandler's victory was the support given him by various organizations and interest groups. He received the assistance of various labor organizations such as the United Mine Workers, many Railroad Brotherhoods and the state Federation of Labor. In addition he received the support of business. Kentucky's Retail Merchants Association had been one of the earliest supporters of Chandler's candidacy. The help of this group was of particular importance in Northern Kentucky and the Louisville area.

Confronted by the opposition of organized labor, many business leaders, the national administration, and Chandler's own popularity, Swope was defeated. It is doubtful that any Republican candidate could have done better than Swope. It has already been noted that he achieved greater success than had other Republicans candidates in the state in that decade. Chandler enjoyed all of the advantages and he wisely used them.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Chandler's election as governor marked the end of one of the most exciting political contests in Kentucky's history. The reasons for his victory are many. One of the most important factors in his successful bid for the gubernatorial election was the depression and the economic hardships which many people suffered as a result of it. During this period, as the basic tenets of American society were being given their greatest trial, Kentuckians showed a tremendous interest in political affairs. This interest was demonstrated in record-breaking turnouts on election days. Although Republican voters also showed a greater interest in political questions, the increase was of greatest benefit to the Democratic Party and its candidate. Because many people blamed the Republican Party for the depression the Democratic Party was looked upon with new and greater favor. However, this merely added to the majority the Democratic Party had held in the state since the Civil War.

Another factor related to the depression which played a major part in Chandler's victory, was the New Deal program of the Roosevelt administration. Such measures as old-age assistance and social security were extremely

popular in the state. Although Swope, the G.O.P. candidate endorsed these and other New Deal measures, Chandler enjoyed the advantage of representing the political party that was most responsible for them.

The prestige and popularity of the President in the state was also of great value to Chandler. Roosevelt's endorsement and active support probably gained for Chandler many votes. The significance of this factor is indicated by Swope's avoidance of any discussion of the national administration and by his call for a concentration on the problems of the state.

The Roosevelt administration gave more than indirect support to Chandler. Officials, such as Postmaster General Farley, visited Kentucky on behalf of the Democratic gubernatorial candidate. In addition, Senators Barkley and M. M. Logan spoke throughout the state, urging the election of Chandler. Further assistance was rendered by the Roosevelt administration in the form of letters to Kentuckians who were on national welfare rolls. These letters implied that the continuation of New Deal programs depended on Chandler's election. The assistance and influence of the Roosevelt administration was thus one of the most significant factors in Chandler's victory over the Republican candidate. But it can also be attributed as a factor in his defeat of Rhea. It was the contention of the Rhea forces that Roosevelt supported Chandler in the primary contests. Although there is little evidence of this, the charge did

not harm Chandler. On the contrary, the idea that the President favored Chandler probably aided him.

Part of Chandler's success can be attributed to the support given him by labor and business organizations in the state. Businessmen who opposed the sales tax were early supporters of the Democratic candidate. And virtually all the large labor organizations endorsed Chandler's candidacy. Their influence was seen in the votes of the industrial areas and in the coal-mining district of southeastern Kentucky.

The nature of Kentucky politics from 1931 to 1935 was also a major cause of Chandler's election. The extreme factionalism of Democratic politics in this period attracted widespread attention. This undoubtedly increased voter participation, particularly in the primary elections. Continually during this period the Laffoon-Rhea faction of the party advocated measures which were counter to public sentiment. In each case, Chandler accurately sensing public reaction, gave his support to the more popular cause.

In 1931 Chandler was an obscure political figure. By 1935 he was among the best known men of the state. Early in the Laffoon administration, differences which occurred during the nominating convention reappeared. Soon Chandler emerged as the anti-administration leader. His opposition to the sales tax and his role in the primary controversy made him the best candidate the anti-administration

faction could run. It also accounted for his popularity with voters and for a great many of the votes he received in the primary elections and in the general election.

Chandler's term as governor proved to be one of the most productive in the state's history. True to his campaign promises he reorganized the state government along more efficient lines suggested by a team of experts, and called a special session of the General Assembly which repealed the sales tax. Furthermore, he reduced the state's debt while providing for the necessary relief measures.

Although the factionalism within the Democratic Party was not ended in 1935, not since that year has it been so intense or disruptive. In 1938 Chandler alienated many in the party by opposing Barkley for the senatorial nomination. The following year, Keen Johnson, who was largely acceptable to both groups, won the gubernatorial nomination.

Despite the fact that the election did not end completely the factionalism, it did signal the final death of bi-partisan rule. Laffoon, after his break with many of his own party members, had once again sought the aid of Republicans. This type of system was thoroughly discredited and has not reappeared.

The 1935 gubernatorial election was significant because it saw the emergence of a new type of leadership. Chandler represented a dynamic, youthful type of public official who appeared able to cope with the monumental

problems facing the society. Because of him, the people of the state would always make their party's political nomination. Even more persuasive to many voters, was the fact that he had opposed the sales tax before its passage and thus appeared a champion of the poor and downtrodden. Although his election appeared to many as a victory for the laborer, farmer and coal miner, it was also a victory for many business interests which opposed the sales tax.

Few political contests in the state's history can equal the 1935 election in controversy, colorfulness or excitement. In none was more interest demonstrated at the polls.

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