

Indiana's Last October Campaign

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Until after the election of 1880, the Indiana vote for the President had more than a casual importance; for, until 1881, Indiana was one of the "October" states. Moreover, Indiana was always one of the "doubtful" states, and the way it went in October was thought to be a sure index to the final result in November. It was common to hear the remark, "the way Indiana and New York go, so goes the nation."¹ Indeed it was not mere supposition on the part of politicians that led them to believe that Indiana indicated something of importance in October, for from the time Indiana began to vote for President in 1816 until the election of 1884, this state had missed the national guess but three times; in 1836 when it voted for William Henry Harrison, in 1848 when Lewis Cass received a majority of the votes, and again in 1876 when Samuel J. Tilden was the choice.

Perhaps this small percentage of error may be reduced still further, if we take into consideration the fact that Harrison was a particular pet of Indiana, and four years later, also of the nation, and one can hardly say that the selection of Tilden in 1876 was far from the national mark. Indiana had the habit of selecting the right man to such a degree that on one occasion, when the selection for state officers went against the national decision, yet the state stayed with the winning party in the matter of selecting the President. The two facts, namely that Indiana usually selected the right man and that it was an "October" state, meant much of importance as to the handling of the state campaign. Neither party could afford to let one stone remain unturned in the effort to carry the state over the line in the right direction.

An element that was sure to play conspicuously into the politics of the Hoosier state for many succeeding years occurred in 1874-1875. This was the period of the so-called

¹ LaFollett, *The History of the Campaign Funds from 1876 to 1892*, pp. 18. (Master's thesis in Library of University of Wisconsin.)

"Tidal-wave" elections in many states, when the political color of these several states changed so decidedly that there was immediate evidence of a national change coming. In the election for representatives of the Forty-Fourth congress in this year, Massachusetts, New York, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, Delaware, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and other northern states of Republican disposition went Democratic with almost the entire South.² In this move on the part of Indiana and in the following elections, the state still maintained its record for leadership in the decision for the President, Tilden receiving the popular vote in 1876. The causes for the change of disposition in Indiana were various; the unfortunate affairs in Washington during President Grant's second term, and especially the "Belknap affair" had much to do with it, and the panic of 1873 made some Democratic votes. But probably more important than either of these was the effect of the Resumption Act of 1875 on Indiana's debtor communities. Indiana was always close to the line, and there was easily a sufficient number of borrowing individuals, especially in southern Indiana, to throw the decision against the party responsible for the Resumption act.

In the election of 1876, Indiana was the fighting ground for the two political parties.³ By 1880 the position had changed but little. The Greenback movement undoubtedly reached its climax when the national convention of that party met in Toledo on Washington's birthday in 1878. At that time it had more just argument and more actual power than it had ever had before and more than it was to have at any time afterward. Indiana was one of the first states to follow up the Toledo convention with a systematic campaign for Greenback organization; the organization was effected in 1878 and, in 1880, the party appeared ready to contend in the national election with the two old line groups. The National-Greenback-Labor party, as the alignment was known during this election, held a convention in Indianapolis on April 28, 1880, at which time a platform was adopted, resembling close-

² Kinney, *The Presidential Campaign of 1876*. (University of Wisconsin thesis.)

³ Carmichael, O. P. *The Election of 1876, With Special Reference to Indiana*. (In *Indiana Quarterly Magazine of History*, Dec., 1913.)

ly the National platform. This document declared that the people were capable of managing their own finances, under government control; that the government was capable of managing its financial interests without the aid of outside banks; that high prices were due to the fact that the moneyed interests were in control. It demanded that all currency should be made legal tender; that the national debt should be paid immediately; that the right of free speech should be guaranteed. In addition, it pronounced Chinese labor unjustifiable; and demanded that the government should secure the laborer in his rights. On this platform, Richard Gregg was nominated for Governor.⁴

The Republican platform, adopted at the convention which met at Indianapolis, June 18, acted about as might have been expected. The national resolutions were endorsed, emigration without investigation was proposed, dishonest promissory notes were denounced, protection of laborers was favored, and the pension item was given the usual attention.⁵

The Democratic platform, formulated at the convention on June 10, began with an elaborately worded congratulation for the success of the party during the preceding four years. Then followed a declaration against class-legislation; one in favor of putting paper money and coin at par; and one against the attempt of Republican leaders to form a strong central power. Pensions were endorsed, economy in public school expenditure was lauded, a sting concerning the methods of the Republican party in the election of 1876 was delivered, and Chinese labor received the same denunciation given it by the Greenbackers. The prosperity of the period was credited to conditions for which the Republican party was not to blame; the continuance of the two-thirds rule was favored, and Hendricks was approved for the presidential nominee of the national party.⁶

The campaign opened with these three platforms before the people. The Greenbackers had changed names since the last presidential election, and they felt that they were not

⁴ *Appleton's Annual Encyclopedia*, 1880, pp. 394.

⁵ Henry, *State Platforms of the Two Dominant Political Parties in Indiana, 1850-1900*, pp. 62.

⁶ Henry, *Ibid.*, pp. 60.

as strong as they had been four years before; the Republicans knew that they were not in any easy way for victory; and the Democrats, having gained two more congressmen in the election of 1878, felt that they had every reason to be encouraged.

As the campaign proceeded, three issues stood out as the real questions of the election. The first was the question of the constitutional vote in Indiana. The Indiana constitution of 1852 provided that an amendment, in order to become part of the constitution of the state, should pass the vote of two successive General Assemblies and then be submitted to the popular vote of the state. According to this provision, seven amendments passed the General Assembly in 1877 and again in 1879, and they were presented forthwith to the people of the state in April, 1879.⁷ The popular vote seemed to be favoring the amendments when two flaws appeared to disturb matters and to react against the party which had perpetrated the errors. One man in the legislature had voted for one of the amendments according to a provision in the first of the series of amendments, whereas he should have voted according to the previous ruling, and, moreover, there was found to be no provision for the accurate counting of the number who voted. The whole matter was laid before the state supreme court, and this body decided that the flaws invalidated the new amendment.⁸

The second issue was the discussion of the free trade plan of the Democrats near the end of the canvass. Of course this was stock material but, nevertheless, it is estimated that enough employees were stirred up against the Democrats to lose them at least a thousand votes.⁹ The third and most important item in the campaign was not an issue at all; it consisted of a most undignified abuse of individuals and general "mud-slinging." The real policies of the parties were not discussed seriously at all, and the Republicans had as little as possible to say about finance. An Indiana correspondent of the *New York Nation* reported the following: "One mem-

⁷ *Appleton's Annual Encyclopedia*, 1879, pp. 496.

⁸ *Appleton's Annual Encyclopedia*, 1880, pp. 393.

⁹ Novels, Russel Wason, *Six Presidential Elections in Indiana*, pp. 12. (University of Wisconsin Thesis.)

ber of the state committee [Republican] remarked in my hearing, that 'the less we say about finances in this country the better we are off' ".¹⁰ The real problem of the campaign did not hang upon anything more statesmanlike than "carry the state."

The canvass started out with more spirit than the one of 1878 had known, both parties fully cognizant of the importance of victory in this "doubtful" state. The importance which the Democrats for example, attached to winning the state is illustrated by the fact that the Democratic central committee chairman, Barnum, moved his headquarters to Indianapolis during the last week of the campaign. He was there personally to supervise the canvass, and the Republicans claimed that he brought interesting money with him.¹¹

The Republicans brought their strongest speakers into the state; James G. Blaine, Lyman Trumbull and Roscoe Conkling were to be heard in every town of any size. Carl Schurz did some of the best work for his party in Indiana at this time; his speech in Indianapolis, July 20, was a masterful appeal to reason, and he showed his good sense by trying to make the audience see the danger of a change, rather than by tearing his hair madly over sentimentalities, as many of the other speakers did.¹² Perhaps the next best thing from the standpoint of orderly discussion of important questions was a series of joint debates between the two candidates of the leading parties for governor. These debates are said to have been carried on with "reasonable decorum".¹³

With the exception of the foregoing illustrations, the campaign speeches consisted of clap-trap and generally senseless appeals to emotion. Finally the whole thing degenerated into petty personalities. A fair illustration of the typical campaign speech is presented by Albert G. Porter, nominee for Governor on the Republican ticket, who dwelt usually on the three points, the humble origin of Garfield, the glorious record of the Republican party, and the plans of the "Solid South"

¹⁰ *New York Nation*, correspondence, Oct. 21, 1880.

¹¹ Nowels, *Ibid.*, pp. 12.

¹² *New York Nation*, July 22, 1880.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1880.

to come into power. It would seem that the Republicans might well have discussed the question of silver coinage and the retirement of the Greenbacks, but these seem to have been studiously avoided. Anything that would get the popular ear was fit for stumping purposes, and nothing else was considered.¹⁴ The correspondent of the *New York Nation* observed that he had heard the the Civil Service question mentioned in two instances and the retirement of the Greenbacks not at all.¹⁵ The mud-slinging was blamed more on the Democrats than the Republicans, for it all seems to have started with the Democratic nominee for governor, Franklin Landers, calling his opponent, Porter, a drunkard.¹⁶ The *New York World*, probably biased, remarked at the end of the campaign that the Republican ideas of politics and finance were reflected well in the campaign:

They [the Republicans] are now audible all over the city through penny whistles, tin trumpets, and fire-crackers. The streets are full of half-grown boys making noises, and the bar-rooms of drunken members of the party [talking] of great moral ideas.¹⁷

Probably the same thing might well have been said concerning the Democratic party. Enthusiasm ran high in both parties; said the *New York Nation* on the eve of the election:

In Indiana both parties are very enthusiastic, and will both carry the State, the Democrats by 15,000, and the Republicans by 8,000 majority.¹⁸

One of the interesting phases of the campaign was its cost. More than once has Indiana been assisted by both parties from the outside in the all-important matter of financing a canvass, and more than once have suggestive remarks been passed concerning wrong uses of funds by members of both parties. The Republicans were charged in the case of this election with bringing at least \$300,000 into the state from the east.¹⁹ Whatever the amount used, it is sure that twenty

¹⁴ *New York Nation*, Oct. 21, 1880, in "Correspondence on the 'Evolution of the Indiana Campaign'".

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Oct. 21, 1880.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1880.

¹⁷ *New York World*, Oct. 14, 1880.

¹⁸ *New York Nation*, Sept. 30, 1880.

¹⁹ *Nowels, Ibid.*, pp. 18.

prominent business men of Philadelphia met September 9 to consider ways of getting money for the Indiana campaign, and it is also sure that five days later they issued a letter to Pennsylvania manufacturers, showing the immediate need for aid in the Indiana Republican organization. The Wall Street capitalists raised a special fund; the campaign committee of Maine granted \$25,000 for use in Indiana; Boston, it seems, sent \$175,000, and a large sum was collected in New York city.²⁰ Individuals aided materially; one man is said to have contributed \$50,000. A student of the subject of campaign finance states that, "there was a fixed price for almost every elective office."²¹ In addition to these considerable amounts raised on the outside, much also came from within; it is estimated that Oliver P. Morton collected \$300,000 within twenty-four hours in Indiana.²² The facts about the amount of money collected and used by the Democrats are more obscure, but it is a safe guess that, whatever amount they had, it totalled much less than the amount raised by the Republicans, for they had fewer sources from which money could come. In all, the two parties could hardly have spent less than a million dollars on the campaign.²³

Corruption in the use of party money is a very hard thing to prove in any instance, and I certainly do not have the material to prove that there was any corruption in Indiana in the campaign of 1880. However, the claim was made by each party that the other used corrupt practice, both as regards the use of funds and also by making use of "repeaters." Many of the claims are unsubstantiated, and all of the unproved statements of either concerning the other must be taken "with a grain of salt." Nevertheless, it will not be out of the way to repeat the most trustworthy claims.

The first claim by both parties was that the other grossly misused money in the election. The Republicans had more charged against them on this score than their rivals, probably because of an incident which stood out with great prominence. This incident is centered in the fact that Stephen W.

²⁰ LaFollett, *Ibid.*, pp. 23-25 and *New York World*, Oct. 6, 1880.

²¹ LaFollett, *Ibid.*, pp. 23.

²² *World's Work*, Vol. 1, pp. 78.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 77.

Dorsey, secretary of the Republican National committee, was the most active worker for the Republicans in Indiana. Nothing much was said about the abuse of funds while the campaign was actually in progress, but, on February 11, 1881, at Delmonico's in New York, some interesting remarks were made. The occasion was a dinner in honor of the successful work which Dorsey had done in the campaign. That it was no small affair may be gathered from a list of the most prominent Republican names represented there; the list includes among others the following: John Jacob Astor, J. Pierpont Morgan, John A. Stewart, Levi P. Morton, Thurlow Weed, Jesse Seligman, Frank Work, Robert Lenox Kennedy, F. S. Winston, Henry B. Hyde, D. O. Mills, B. Cannon, William S. Dinsmore and M. W. Cooper.²⁴ Each speech of the evening was burdened with the single topic: the success of Dorsey in the Hoosier state. One of the most striking remarks of the evening came from Whitelaw Reed when he humorously suggested: * * *

that there was in fact a regular school for Republican canvassers instituted in Indianapolis, of which Mr. Dorsey was the president and chief professor.²⁵

The speeches of the others followed the same general laudatory trend from one to another until Mr. Arthur's turn came. The results of his speech were far reaching enough to be worthy of repetition, in part. Speaking in praise of the man who "carried Indiana," he proceeded with this remark:

Indiana was really, I suppose, a Democratic state. It has been put down on the books always as a state that might be carried by close and perfect organization and a great deal of———. I see the reporters are present, therefore I will simply say that everybody showed a great deal of interest in the occasion and distributed tracts and political documents all through the state.²⁶

This speech evoked a round of laughter from the banquetters, and that ended it for the evening. When the report got to the public next day, the word "soft soap" was almost

²⁴ *New York Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1881.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *New York Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1881.

immediately supplied to fill in Mr. Arthur's omission. The public more readily accepted the interpolation because of Mr. Dorsey's concluding remark, in which he

rejoiced at the evidence of awakening interest in the sons of the rich men in the service of their country.²⁷

There was nothing in the happenings at the banquet for which Mr. Dorsey could be convicted of wrongfully using the campaign funds; as far as the speeches went, they were probably only intended to add levity to the evening's proceedings. However, much truth was suggested in the speeches. The people on the outside, and more particularly the defeated party, took up the "Dorsey episode" and used it with all their ability to injure Dorsey's party and his personal reputation. The *New York Nation* claimed that

Dorsey was one of the most disreputable of the Arkansas carpet-baggers of the reconstruction period²⁸;

moreover, they stated that Dorsey was directly connected with the "Star-route" frauds of Grant's second term, saying * * * that it appears as if what may be called Dorsey's "military family" pocketed a cool \$445,826 between them.²⁹ W. P. Fishback, a prominent lawyer of Indianapolis and a former partner with General Harrison, wrote an open letter to Stanton J. Peele, Republican congressman from Indiana, in 1883, saying:

Men like Dorsey will come to Indianapolis again, as they came in 1880, and distribute four hundred thousand dollars in the Dennison House parlors, to be used in buying votes, hiring repeaters, bribing election officials to stuff ballot-boxes and falsify election returns³⁰

The fact that this open letter was never challenged caused many to believe that its statements were literally true. Mr. Dorsey admitted that \$400,000 was spent in Indiana, but not by him, merely under his direction.³¹ Whatever the facts in

²⁷ *Chicago Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1881.

²⁸ *New York Nation*, Feb. 17, 1881.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, April 28, 1881.

³⁰ LaFollett, *Ibid.*, pp. 26.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26.

the case were, the charges told heavily on the party in the next election.

Misuse of party funds was but one of the charges levied by each party on the other's canvass plans. The *New York Herald* came out with a statement, October 11, headed, "Influx of convicts, murderers, sneak-thieves, burglars, and bronco men" and * * * "money for fraud, none for comfort is charged on both sides."⁸² This far away from the time of the event the heading seems laughable, but it at least represents the belief of both parties to some extent. A circumstance which made it possible for this type of accusation to circulate was the fact that the state was operating under the election law of 1859, which provided that the trustee of each township should be the inspector of elections. The law further stipulated that the trustee was to appoint two voters, with the consent of the voters present before the opening of the polls; these two with the trustee to constitute an election board.⁸³ The provisions of this law made it possible, therefore, for one party or the other to control the election board.

In the matter of "repeaters" the claims of each of the parties concerning the activity of the other were much better founded than were the claims as to financial dishonesty. The statement became notoriously common that the vote of a Hoosier was "worth a crisp two-dollar bill."⁸⁴ The most important claim of the Democrats was that the Republicans were "colonizing" Indiana with men from all parts of the country, and especially with negroes from Kentucky.⁸⁵ Exactly the same charge was brought by the Republicans against the Democrats, concerning the bringing of men from the east. Early in October, "The Boys in Blue" met at Indianapolis and this was interpreted by many as being merely a cover for the influx of desperate characters.⁸⁶ It is an interesting coincidence that at the same time many clerks in Washington were getting leaves of absence in order to return home to vote; and many of these were thought to be on their way "to attend

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 24 (quoted from the *New York Herald*, Oct. 11, 1880.)

⁸³ *Laws of Indiana*, 1859, pp. 110-111.

⁸⁴ LaFollett, *Ibid.*, pp. 25.

⁸⁵ *New York Tribune*, Oct. 7, 1880. "Stories of the importation of negro voters continue to appear in the Democratic organs".

⁸⁶ *New York World*, Oct. 6, 1880.

the meeting of the 'Boys in Blue' ".³⁷ On October 8 the New York *Tribune* stated that "The Democrats have brought a gang of Philadelphia 'roughs' here (Indianapolis) under charge of the notorious Alderman 'Bill McMullin' "; detectives were reported to be following.³⁸ Chairman Barnum of the Democratic Central committee was said to have been in Indiana often * * * "distributing money in the different localities."³⁹ The Chicago *Tribune* printed the statement on October 10, that each Democratic boss in each school district of the state had been sent one hundred dollars.⁴⁰

The same paper mentioned above is responsible for the statement that there was an organized plan on foot among the Democrats for the capturing of the state. The plan, which is outlined below, was supposed to have been captured from one of the leaders of the party. According to the captured plan, there were eight well planned steps to be taken in each voting district; First, a large number of Democrats would cast their votes; second, having gathered together at a convenient distance, they would start a quarrel; the quarrel well under way, they would produce billies and the little quarrel would have turned into a fight; a state of riot having been achieved, the governor would call the troops to the polls; the troops called would not be state troops but merely a secret Democratic military organization; state arms would be procured at the rendezvous of the Democratic party; the riot would continue until the armed forces had had time to rifle and change the ballots. The whole scheme seems so manufactured that it is hard to understand that people were affected by its publication, and yet it seems evident that it did have some effect on the vote at the polls.⁴¹

Toward the close of the campaign the two more important parties began exchanging more and more bitter remarks and accusations. In the heat of the bad feeling, October 11, a negro janitor in Indianapolis shot and seriously injured a white Democrat, and this incident was of course immediately

³⁷ Chicago *Tribune*, Oct. 6, 1880.

³⁸ New York *Tribune*, Oct. 8, 1880.

³⁹ LaFollett, *Ibid.*, pp. 27.

⁴⁰ Chicago *Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1880.

⁴¹ Chicago *Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1880.

attributed to Republican agitation. That the incident had some effect upon the result of the election seems clear.⁴² A new and interesting claim by the Republicans appeared just before the election. They declared that a Mr. Gilbert De La-Matyr, Greenbacker, desirous of retaining his seat in congress, made a bargain with the Democrats whereby the Greenback party was to support the Democratic candidate in the Ninth district in return for the nomination and support of De La-Matyr in his own district by the Democrats.⁴³ The culmination of all of these charges came in the form of a mass-meeting held in Indianapolis in nonpartisan fashion, "to resist the encroachments of a corrupt Democracy and to adopt measures for the extermination of Democratic repeaters and slugs and thieves."⁴⁴

When the day of election came, none of the disorder which had been predicted occurred. The vote was the heaviest that had ever been polled up to that time in the state and that was probably due to the hard work of managers on both sides. Of course, this neither proves nor disproves the charge of corruption. Out of 498,437 eligible citizens, 470,738 voted; that number is not incompatible with legitimate methods.⁴⁵

In both the October and the November elections the Republicans were successful. The vote for the two elections was as follows:⁴⁶

October election			November election		
Rep.	Dem.	Gbk.	Rep.	Dem.	Gbk.
Porter	Landers	Gregg	Garfield	Hancock	Weaver
231,405	224,452	14,881	232,164	225,522	12,986
49.15%	47.68%	3.16%	49.32%	47.91%	2.77%
Total vote			Total vote		
470,738			470,672		

The most evident fact observable upon a casual view of the returns is that the Greenback vote did not come up as

⁴² *New York World*, Oct. 11, 1880, and *New York Nation*, Oct. 21, 1880. "The campaign in Indiana has given another demonstration of the total lack of principle of the Republican machine, and of the hopelessness of ever securing through its agency an honest discussion before the people of things necessary in good government in this country".

⁴³ *New York Nation*, Sept. 29, 1880.

⁴⁴ Nowles, *Ibid.*, from *Chicago Times*, Oct. 8, 1880.

⁴⁵ Nowles, *Ibid.*, pp. 15.

⁴⁶ *Tribune Almanac*, 1881.

high as the expectations of its leaders, and consequently the other two parties gained. The big day of the Greenbackers was a thing of the past and the conservative members drifted back into the old parties. Many of these conservatives were determined to do something to change the unsatisfactory labor conditions of the country, and they had come to the conclusion that the new party had little chance of quick success along this line.⁴⁷ Also, many leaders in the country went into the Democratic ranks to indicate their disapproval of Republican management in general. Whatever the reasons, it is evident from the returns that the Greenback party had nothing like the success for which they had hoped; and it is patent that many who voted in October for the new party changed their votes in November, and both of the old parties gained by this fact.

In neither the local nor the national election was the Republican victory a landslide. The correspondent of the *New York Nation* gives the following estimate as to how the Republicans gained the ten thousand votes between the election of 1876 and that of 1880. Although not based on exhaustive examination, yet it serves to suggest a fair estimate of the additional votes. Here is the estimate: 1, Independent votes; 2, bulk of the business men gained in the last few weeks of the campaign; 3, manufacturers; 4, votes due to the unpopularity of Landers; 5, votes due to the personal unpopularity of English; 6, votes of Democrats dissatisfied with the overthrow of the constitutional amendments.⁴⁸ Many of these above-mentioned factions will be recognized as regular Republican voters, but it must be remembered that many of these had been disaffected by labor and financial conditions in the early seventies, as well as by the political scandals for which the Republicans were blamed.

It would seem evident that the campaign in Indiana in 1880 was of no small consequence in deciding the national election of that year, and the campaign managers were not wrong in their judgment that Indiana must be carried if the national election was to go the right way. Although it is practically

⁴⁷ Haynes, Fred E., *Third Party Movements Since the Civil War*, pp. 141 and 144. There was "a landslide, a tidal wave, an earthslip, or whatever you would like to call it".

⁴⁸ *New York Nation*, Oct. 21, 1880.

impossible to determine with exactitude just how much fraud was practiced on each side, the advertisement which such action got served to add fuel to the bitterness of the campaign. Likewise it is impossible to determine just how much injury was done to the Democratic party in Indiana by the mud slinging, of which they certainly got the most. Possibly there were sufficient items, aside from the charges of fraud, to have put the election over in favor of the Republicans. However it is hard not to feel, after seeing the material, that slander had its part in determining Indiana's vote.

In 1880 Indiana was still a "doubtful" state, for it moved back into the Republican column. Indiana has not yet lost her importance in deciding national contests, but 1880 was the last time Indiana was to be so conspicuous because of its early election.