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THE GOLDEN SILENCE

The Virginia Democratic Party and the Presidential Election of 1948

by James R. Sweeney*

On February 2, 1948, President Harry S. Truman sent his civil-rights message to Congress. The origins of this document went back to December 1946 when Truman issued an executive order creating a Committee on Civil Rights. The committee made its report in the fall of 1947. It called for federal action to end discrimination in employment, to protect the right to vote, to make lynching a federal offense, and to take other steps to secure the black man's rights. President Truman's message included ten of the committee's recommendations. He asked Congress for an anti-lynching law, an end to segregation in interstate transportation, a Fair Employment Practices Commission, laws to protect the right to vote, a permanent Civil Rights Commission, and self-government for the District of Columbia. He also promised executive action to remove discrimination in federal employment and segregation in the armed forces.¹

Senator Harry F. Byrd of Virginia joined in the outcry of Southern politicians against the civil-rights message. He advised against any precipitate action, telling a reporter, "We must make a calm, deliberate decision, on the basis of events as they happen and then be prepared to go through with it to the end." Senator Byrd and Governor William M. Tuck, however, had already decided to take drastic action to show the president and the nation how much Virginians resented the civil-rights proposals. Senator Byrd had informed E. R. Combs, his closest political advisor, about the kind of legislation that was needed to show Virginians' resentment. Byrd wrote:

The new legislation should provide clearly that the names of the candidates are not to be printed on the ticket, but that the organization of each political party can give the name of the party with the electors printed underneath and then vote by marking the circle opposite the name. You know more about this than I do, but the main purpose is to get the names of the candidates off of the ballot.

Governor Tuck on February 26 sent to the General Assembly his so-called Anti-Truman bill which embodied the ideas expressed in Senator Byrd's letter. Tuck's action was somewhat ironic. Two months earlier Tuck had

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written to the Democratic National Chairman, J. Howard McGrath, assuring him of "my desire to cooperate wholeheartedly in every way to raise money with which to finance the 1948 campaign, and to elect the entire Democratic ticket." 2

In his message to the General Assembly Governor Tuck urged the enactment of a law eliminating the names of presidential and vice-presidential candidates from the ballot. Voters would cast their ballots only for presidential electors under the name of the party of their choice. The governor also asked for legislation to limit the presidential ballot to electors representing parties which participated in the last presidential election or polled ten percent or more of the vote in the past five years. This provision would have eliminated the Progressive Party of Henry Wallace from the ballot. Under the Tuck bill presidential electors would be obligated to vote for the candidates for president and vice-president nominated by the national convention of their party, unless the state convention of their party or a party committee designated by the state convention instructed the electors to vote for a different candidate. This meant that the Virginia Democratic State Convention or the party's Central Committee could choose the candidate for whom the people would be voting when they made an "x" beside the name of the Democratic Party on the ballot. President Truman thus could be denied a place on the ballot if he were nominated by the national Democratic Party and the Virginia Democratic Party instructed the Democratic electors to vote for someone else.3

Governor Tuck attacked President Truman's civil-rights proposals unsparingly in his message to the legislature. He said the civil-rights program was the result of "iniquitous influences" that had crept into both major parties. If the civil-rights proposals were enacted, it would give the federal government "sufficient power to create in America the counterpart of a Hitler or a Stalin." The "hordes" of police employed by the proposed Fair Employment Practices Commission could easily be converted into a "huge Gestapo." Tuck remarked that for a long time the Democratic Party had taken the South for granted. If Virginia and other Southern states would hold back their electoral votes, he believed it would be "an effective remedy for most

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2 Richmond News Leader, February 21, 26, 1948; Harry F. Byrd to E. R. Combs, February 21, 1948, Byrd Papers, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville; William M. Tuck to J. Howard McGrath, December 16, 1947, Tuck Executive Papers, Virginia State Library, Richmond. Senator Byrd headed the dominant, conservative wing of the Virginia Democratic Party from his election to the governorship in 1925 until his death in 1966. E. R. Combs held the post of clerk of the state Senate but was generally regarded as Byrd's most trusted confidant.

3 Richmond News Leader, February 26, 1948.
Is THIS VIRGINIA DEMOCRACY?
of our grievances and insure us an influential voice in the councils of our respective parties.”

The reaction of Organization men to Governor Tuck’s message varied from public endorsement to private criticism. Senator Byrd arose in the United States Senate and praised Governor Tuck’s action. He said that the message might become “historic,” and he secured the Senate’s permission to have it inserted in the Congressional Record. G. Fred Switzer, who became Virginia’s Democratic National Committeeman in 1948, wrote that the bill was “absolutely impossible as well as basically wrong in principle.” A. Willis Robertson, the junior senator from Virginia, remarked, “Had I been consulted before the initial move was made, I would have strongly opposed it.”

Anti-Organization leaders denounced Governor Tuck’s proposals. Martin Hutchinson described the bill as “shocking.” Delegate Robert Whitehead of Nelson County attacked the bill as “conceived hurriedly and drawn in an ill-advised way.” Francis Pickens Miller, who had represented Fairfax County in the House of Delegates before World War II, was very much disturbed by Tuck’s bill. He viewed it as a complete denial of America’s democratic form of government.

The newspapers of Virginia launched a devastating attack on Tuck’s bill. The Richmond Times-Dispatch saw it as “dangerous and undemocratic . . . an attempt to solve the problem on an emotional rather than a rational basis.” The Roanoke Times remarked that “every qualified voter in the state ought to have an opportunity to vote for the candidate of his choice.” The Portsmouth Star found it “ironic indeed that the proposal to deprive the people of their vote should originate in Virginia, site of the first free election on American soil.” The Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch viewed the plan with “extreme doubt,” while the Newport News Times-Herald stressed the “violence” that the Tuck bill did to democracy. The Lynchburg News believed that the denial to some Virginians of the opportunity to vote for the nominee of their choice raised “a serious objection to the plan.”

4 Richmond News Leader, February 26, 1948.
5 Ibid.; G. Fred Switzer to A. Willis Robertson, March 10, 1948, Robertson to Switzer, March 12, 1948, G. Fred Switzer Papers, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville. A. Willis Robertson had been elected to the United States Senate in a special election to fill the late Carter Glass’s seat in November 1946.
6 Richmond News Leader, February 27, 28, 1948; Francis Pickens Miller to A. Willis Robertson, February 27, 1948, A. Willis Robertson Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg. Martin Hutchinson, an attorney in Richmond, had unsuccessfully challenged Senator Byrd in the 1946 Democratic primary.
Two Virginia newspapers detected an historical parallel between the events of 1948 and those of 1860-1861. H. Maynor Sutherland, editor of the weekly newspaper of Dickenson County in southwestern Virginia, shouted, "Woah, Bill!" in his editorial of March 5. He declared, "Once again Richmond is echoing with the ululating Rebel yell, and secession is rampant." This time it was secession from the Democratic Party. Sutherland warned the governor that "the boys back in the hills are going to vote for the man of their choice come hell and high water, even if we have to secede from Virginia and join Harlan County in Kentucky in a State of Perpetual Anarchy." Douglas Southall Freeman expressed similar thoughts, albeit less colorfully, in the Richmond News Leader. He believed that Tuck was sincere. The governor's motives were "as honorable as those asserted by Southern leaders in 1860." Should the Tuck bill be passed? Freeman's answer was "No, ten thousand times No!" He believed that "No more undemocratic proposal ever was advanced responsibly in the General Assembly of Virginia." After passing the Tuck bill, the General Assembly might be well advised to consider a bill to remove from the seal of Virginia the motto "Sic Semper Tyrannis." It seemed to Freeman that Virginia would be "riveting, not breaking, the chains of political slavery." 8

The Privileges and Elections Committee of the House of Delegates approved Governor Tuck's proposal unanimously the day after he delivered his message. Tuck's representative in the House, Floor Leader E. Blackburn Moore, asked for two amendments "in an effort to quiet down some of the political storm which arose last night." The bill was to be amended so that the Democratic State Central Committee could not by itself instruct the party's presidential electors how to vote in the electoral college. The Democratic State Convention would decide if the electors were to receive new instructions. The other amendment was designed to make it easier for minor parties to get on the ballot in Virginia. Any party would be able to get its electors on the ballot if it qualified in ten other states.9

Neither Governor Tuck nor Senator Byrd intended to make it impossible to vote for President Truman or Henry Wallace. Byrd wrote to State Senator Curry Carter, "I do not approve excluding other parties from the ballot as apparently was inadvertently done with the first legislation introduced." Tuck admitted later that the bill "might have been a little hurriedly drawn," but he denied any intention of making it impossible to vote for Truman.

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8 Clintwood The Dickensonian, March 5, 1948; Richmond News Leader, February 27, 1948.
9 Richmond News Leader, February 27, 1948.
His sole objective, he stated, was "to make it so that Virginia could decide who the official Democratic nominee for President would be." 10

The Richmond newspapers, unimpressed by Delegate Moore's amendments, continued their attacks on Governor Tuck's proposals. The *Times-Dispatch* was angered by the manner in which the bill was "railroaded" through the House Privileges and Elections Committee. The Committee took it up with no public notice and, when two citizens asked to be heard, the Committee went into executive session. In a few minutes the bill was reported unanimously. The *News Leader* urged Virginians to "rise up immediately in protest" or they would lose their liberty. 11

As opposition to the Tuck elections bill increased, the Organization's leadership was forced to make additional concessions. Moore moved that the bill be recommitted "in view of continued misrepresentations and misunderstandings of its provisions." Arrangements were made to hold joint public hearings of the Privileges and Elections Committees of the House and Senate on the evening of March 4. Perhaps a statement by Martin Hutchinson might have given the Tuck Administration some second thoughts. Hutchinson threatened to send a rival delegation to the Democratic National Convention to represent the "real Democrats" of Virginia. He called this course of action his trump card against Governor Tuck's call for secession. The *Times-Dispatch* and the *News Leader* kept up their barrage of criticism. The *Times-Dispatch* believed that the best amendment that could be offered would be "one amending the plan out of existence." The *News Leader* urged citizens to write their representatives to "let them know that you understand the implications and evil possibilities of this plan." 12

The continuing opposition to the Tuck elections bill convinced the Organization's leaders that major changes would have to be made. Armistead L. Boothe, 13 who was a freshman member of the House of Delegates, has recalled how these changes came about. Over the weekend nearly all of the legislators went home, where they discovered strong sentiment had developed against the bill. When he arrived back in Richmond, Boothe informed Blackburn Moore about the situation across the state. Boothe and several other legislators went to the Executive Mansion and saw Governor Tuck,

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13 Armistead L. Boothe, a former Rhodes Scholar, was the son of Gardiner L. Boothe, former chairman of the Democratic Committee in the Eighth District.
who was in bed with an attack of influenza. The leaders of the Organization at the meeting asked Boothe and Assistant Attorney General Walter E. Rogers to rewrite the bill. The amended version retained some of the features of the original bill. If the nominee of the national Democratic Party were unacceptable to the Virginia Democrats, the state convention could reconvene and instruct the presidential electors appearing under the label of the Democratic Party to vote for someone else. The supporters of the national Democratic nominee, however, could get his name on the ballot by obtaining the signatures of one thousand voters and filing these with the State Board of Elections. The same procedure would apply to Henry Wallace's Progressive Party or any other party.  

The reaction to the amended bill was mixed. Anti-Organization forces denounced the substitute much as they had attacked the original. Martin Hutchinson greeted it as the same old bill "in a new false face." Francis Pickens Miller, speaking at the public hearing on the bill, said it was "a little secession—from a party" and it ought to be killed. He added that no one resented the civil-rights proposals of President Truman more than he did. Virginia Democrats, however, should stay and fight things out within the Democratic Party. Robert Whitehead described the bill as still "flagrantly unconstitutional and without honor."  

Within the Byrd Organization there was a closing of the ranks behind the new version of the Tuck elections bill. Senator Byrd wrote, "I think all reasonable objections have been removed." Fred Switzer found the amended bill to be "perfectly fair in every respect." Senator Robertson agreed with Switzer that "the bill . . . was far better than the one originally introduced." Yet he was still worried and hoped that the bill would not have to be used "because undoubtedly it would leave scars that would be long in healing." Boothe said that by the new version of the bill the Democratic Party of Virginia was fighting back against President Truman's ill-advised proposals "in an honorable and lawful way." The new elections bill was "as liberal as any voting law in the world today."  

The remaining history of the Tuck elections bill was anticlimactic. On March 8 the house Privileges and Elections Committee passed the substitute

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15 Richmond News Leader, March 4, 5, 9, 1948.
version by a vote of eleven to one. The House of Delegates approved the bill the next day with seventy-four members in favor and twenty-five opposed. The Senate Privileges and Elections Committee amended the bill further to allow the candidate's name to appear on the ballot under the party designation. Governor Tuck had approved this change. President Truman's name could be on the ballot after all although it might not be under the Democratic Party label. The Senate passed the bill and the House accepted the Senate's changes by a vote of seventy-five to fifteen.17

What had the Organization accomplished? Governor Tuck pointed out that the final bill retained the central provision of the original. He declared:

The core of the bill . . . is in the fact that, if the national convention of a political party nominated a presidential candidate whose policies and principles make him unacceptable to the branch of the party in Virginia, the Virginians may act accordingly and endorse some other candidate of their own choice.18

To obtain this change in the law, the Byrd Organization had provoked severe criticism and united the anti-Organization forces with substantial segments of the press in "a holy crusade."

As a result of the enactment of the Tuck elections bill, the anti-Organization leaders were determined to play a role in the 1948 national election. During the spring of 1947 they had joined together to form an organization of their own to combat the Byrd Organization on the state and local levels. The group adopted the name "The Committee for Democracy in Virginia." Martin Hutchinson, a leader of the Committee for Democracy, wrote to Henry Fowler, a liberal lawyer from Alexandria, informing him that several Democrats who intended to support the nominee of the Democratic National Convention had called him. These "national Democrats" had asked Hutchinson whether they should participate in the Virginia Democratic Convention or stay at home, and he had advised them to stay out of the state convention. Hutchinson told Fowler of a discussion he had with Francis Pickens Miller about a separate convention of Virginia's national Democrats. Miller had advised him to go slow on the question of a separate convention. Miller and Hutchinson had agreed that the entire Virginia situation should be laid before the Democratic National Committee and that a "loyal group" of Democrats from Virginia should go to the Democratic National Convention. The loyal Democrats would demand that the convention's Credentials Committee

require all delegates to sign a loyalty pledge to support the nominees of the
convention before they were seated. 19

After receiving Hutchinson’s letter, Fowler wrote to the Democratic
National Committee’s general counsel, Edward F. Prichard, asking for an
interview. 20 Prichard, in turn, called Fowler’s letter to the attention of Na-
tional Chairman J. Howard McGrath. McGrath assured Prichard that he
would write to Fowler immediately and arrange an interview with him to
discuss the political situation in Virginia. As a result of this interview Fowler
prepared a twenty-five-page typewritten memorandum discussing the Byrd
and anti-Byrd factions in Virginia as well as the legal aspects of the Tuck
elections bill. 21

The leaders of the Byrd Organization were comforting themselves with
the thought that President Truman would not be the Democratic nomi-
nee. Senator Byrd believed that the South’s opposition to Truman’s civil-
rights proposals proved that Truman could not be re-elected. He wrote, “In
my opinion, he will seek an opportunity to withdraw between now and the
convention.” Combs held similar views. He believed it was “hard to con-
ceive of the Democratic National Convention nominating a candidate for
President who everybody agrees has not the remotest chance to be elected.”
He wrote that the nomination of President Truman would be “a confession
of defeat before the campaign begins.” 22

The confused political situation of 1948 inspired the attorney general of
Virginia, J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., to write a legal opinion of considerable
significance. Edmund T. Haynes, a member of the House of Delegates from
Richmond, asked the attorney general two pertinent questions. The first
question dealt with the party status of Democrats who did not support the
Democratic candidate for president. The Democratic Party Plan adopted by
the State Convention in Richmond in 1932 included the following definition
of Democrats:

All white persons who are qualified to vote at the next ensuing general elec-

19 Undated memorandum by Henry H. Fowler, J. Howard McGrath Papers, Harry S.
Truman Library; Martin A. Hutchinson to Henry H. Fowler, March 18, 1948, Hutchinson
Papers, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville.
20 Henry Fowler was Secretary of the Treasury under President Lyndon B. Johnson from
1965 to 1969.
21 Henry H. Fowler to Edward F. Prichard, Jr., March 19, 1948, Prichard to J. Howard
McGrath, March 24, 1948, McGrath to Prichard, March 30, 1948, Undated memorandum by
Henry H. Fowler, McGrath Papers.
22 Harry F. Byrd to William M. Tuck, March 22, 1948, E. R. Combs to Byrd, March 23,
1948, Byrd Papers.
general election in which they voted and in which the Democratic nominee or
nominees had opposition, and who will support all of the nominees of that party
at the next ensuing general election, are hereby declared to be members of the
Democratic Party of Virginia. No person shall be permitted to vote in any
Democratic primary election who is not a member of the Democratic Party as
herein defined.23

Attorney General Almond cited the opinion of Attorney General John R.
Saunders, who was faced with the question of the party standing of Demo-
crats who had voted for Herbert Hoover in 1928. Saunders had ruled that
a Democrat's right to participate in a state primary was not affected by his
vote for presidential electors. Attorney General Abram P. Staples reaffirmed
this opinion in 1939. Almond concluded that the presidential electors were
not "nominees of the party," as defined by the Party Plan. "It follows," he
added, "that no Democrat is barred from participating in Democratic pri-
maries after the 1948 presidential election regardless of what presidential
electors he may cast his ballot for in that election." 24

Mr. Haynes's second question concerned who the "real" Democratic presi-
dential nominee was as far as the Party Plan was concerned. He noted that
under the Party Plan a candidate in the August primary must pledge to
support all the nominees of the party in the general election in November.
The question, then, was whether the candidate was required to vote for the
electors under the name of the candidate chosen by the Democratic National
Convention or the electors of the candidate chosen by the Virginia Demo-
cratic Convention if that convention should choose another candidate. Al-
mond repeated his view that "the words 'nominees of said party' do not
include presidential electors." His opinion was that candidates in the August
Democratic primary could vote for any presidential candidate they wished
without violating the pledge required by the Party Plan. The Richmond
Times-Dispatch speculated that Almond's ruling enhanced the Republicans'
chances of carrying Virginia in 1948. In any event 1948 promised to be
"one of the most interesting political years . . . in generations." 25

Judge Almond has stated that the ruling was entirely his own and not the
product of a conference of Organization leaders. He believed the law should
be flexible enough to accommodate the man who considered himself a Demo-
crat but could not always support the party's candidate for the presidency.

23 J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., to Edward T. Haynes, April 24, 1948, Hutchinson Papers; "Demo-
24 J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., to Edward T. Haynes, April 24, 1948, Hutchinson Papers.
Maybe We Better Wait for the Band Wagon.
"I never believed that the door was closed," Almond declared, "that if you left the so-called house of your fathers politically you could never return." 28

In early June the Organization's high command decided that there would be no bolt from President Truman. Fred Switzer informed Senator Robertson of a meeting at the Governor's Mansion attended by Senator Byrd, Governor Tuck, former Representative Thomas Burch, Combs, and himself. After the meeting Switzer wrote, "I am of the very definite opinion that there will be no walkout in Philadelphia nor an official bolt in November." He predicted that the state convention would instruct against Truman and give the State Central Committee the power to call the convention back. This action, however, would be "merely a face-saving one." Why the Organization's leadership adopted this course of action is an intriguing question. James Latimer of the Times-Dispatch concluded that the anti-Truman bill would not be used because the Organization was looking ahead to a difficult gubernatorial primary in 1949 and wished to alienate as few Democrats as possible. 27

The Democratic State Convention began at Richmond on July 2. Horace Edwards, the mayor of Richmond and the Democratic state chairman, called on the convention to disregard the Tuck plan and either accept the decision of the national convention or secede from the party and not even go to the convention in Philadelphia. After Mayor Edwards's call for reason in his welcoming speech, Delegate W. Tayloe Murphy delivered the keynote address. He attacked the Truman civil-rights program and condemned "a hydra-headed Federal bureaucracy . . . leading the forty-eight states and their peoples into bondage." 28

The Democratic State Convention proved to be a tumultuous affair once the delegates began the serious business of the meeting. Senator Byrd urged the delegates to oppose the nomination of President Truman and to instruct the Virginia delegation to the Democratic National Convention to support General Dwight D. Eisenhower. The movement to draft Eisenhower, whose political affiliation was unknown, had been growing for several months. A survey by the New York Times published on July 5 revealed that Eisenhower probably would get a substantial vote on the first ballot. On that day, however, Eisenhower declared firmly that he would not accept the nomination. 29

28 Personal interview with J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., February 16, 1972.
27 G. Fred Switzer to A. Willis Robertson, June 5, 1948, Switzer Papers; Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 18, 1948.
29 Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 3, 1948; Ross, Loneliest Campaign, pp. 112-113.
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Senator Byrd delivered his endorsement of General Eisenhower while the convention awaited the report of the Resolutions Committee. After the senator's address, Governor Tuck, chairman of the Resolutions Committee, delivered his committee's report. It was in the form of one long resolution of three parts: (a) a lengthy declaration of policy upholding state rights and opposing the president's civil-rights program; (b) the instruction to the delegates to the national convention to support Eisenhower; (c) the plan to recall the state convention if the national convention nominated an unsatisfactory candidate. Tuck moved the adoption of the entire report. The convention's permanent chairman, Speaker of the House G. Alvin Massenburg, called for a voice vote. Several delegates jumped to their feet to protest. There was a shout of "ayes" followed by an equally loud chorus of "noes." Massenburg ruled that the resolutions had been adopted. Several delegates protested. Massenburg declared that the convention had already adopted the resolutions and that he could not see any sense in recording individuals' objections. There were cries for a roll call. Someone shouted, "I'm going home," and several delegations began to walk out. The protesters said that they favored the resolution except the part concerning the recall of the convention. It was revealed that the Resolutions Committee had voted twenty-one to five in favor of the provision for recall.30

The resentment stirred by Speaker Massenburg's actions at the convention did not disappear with adjournment. The Times-Dispatch entitled its lead editorial for July 4 "The Machine Pulls a 'Beaut.'" The editorial reported "terrific resentment even in the ranks of the faithful" at the method of adopting the package resolution without any debate. To the right of the editorial a letter to the editor from a delegate to the state convention proclaimed its message in capital letters. Robert M. Saunders of Newport News protested the "HIGHHANDED, UNFAIR, UNDEMOCRATIC AND DICTATORIAL MANNER IN WHICH THE CONVENTION WAS CONDUCTED." Harrison Mann of Arlington, another delegate, informed Massenburg of his "abhorence [sic] of the arrogant and dictatorial manner in which you conducted the Convention." He also sent a copy of this letter to Governor Tuck. W. Roy Smith, the chairman of the City Central Democratic Committee of Petersburg and a delegate to the state convention, sent Massenburg a resolution of protest signed by the Petersburg delegation to the state convention. Smith pointed out that the delegates had no objections to the resolutions if they had been voted on separately. They were protesting because "those members in attendance who had objections should

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30 Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 3, 1948.
have been allowed opportunity to be heard on a matter so vital.” Smith added, “That is the democratic way and we defend it.” Hutchinson, speaking for the anti-Organization forces, denounced the convention as a “Byrd-Tuck officeholder’s convention” and warned that “the loyal and true Democrats of Virginia will assert themselves in due time.”

Martin Hutchinson’s “loyal and true Democrats” asserted themselves very soon at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia. Hutchinson sent a telegram to Mrs. Mary Norton, chairwoman of the convention’s Credentials Committee, demanding that Virginia’s delegates take a loyalty oath before being seated. He based his suggestion on the requirement in the Virginia Democratic Party Plan that participants in a primary or convention must pledge that they will support the Democratic nominees in the next general election. Mrs. Norton told reporters that Hutchinson’s request was “something completely new” to her. The leaders of the Virginia delegation to the convention remained silent, but displayed no concern over Hutchinson’s challenge to their right to participate in the convention without taking a loyalty oath. Tuck and Byrd both had “no comment” when they were asked about Hutchinson’s action. James Latimer of the Times-Dispatch wrote that apparently the strategy was to ignore Hutchinson’s arguments before the Credentials Committee. The leaders of the delegation would rely upon the lack of precedent and the assumption that the forces backing President Truman would not wish to embitter the South further. Virginians were saying in private that, if a pledge of loyalty were required, they would refuse to take it.

Hutchinson appeared before the Credentials Committee on July 12. He submitted a brief and spoke for five minutes. His speech was an attack on the Tuck elections bill. He proposed that the individual delegates from Virginia should be required not only to support the Democratic nominees in November but also to oppose any efforts to reconvene the state convention. The Credentials Committee rejected Hutchinson’s challenge by a unanimous vote. Senator Hatch of New Mexico told reporters that the committee had no power to require such a pledge. Two spokesmen from the Byrd Organization, John J. Wicker, Jr., of Richmond and Senator Macon M. Long of St. Paul, testified that there would be no bolt by the Virginia Democratic Party. Hutchinson believed his challenge had been successful.


32 Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 11, 12, 1948.
since “It was on the strength of this reassuring statement that the Virginians were seated.”

Hutchinson’s experiences at Philadelphia gave him certain ideas about President Truman’s campaign in Virginia. He was convinced that the “Byrd-Tuck machine” would not bolt, but that the Organization would “stage a sit-down strike and do very little for the party nominees.” He suggested that the supporters of President Truman ask the State Central Committee and its new chairman, G. Alvin Massenburg, to start a campaign for Truman “at an early date.” If the State Central Committee took no action, then, Hutchinson declared, the anti-Organization people would launch their own campaign.

The Virginia delegation to the Democratic National Convention spent a frustrating week in Philadelphia. The group held a caucus at 10:00 A.M. on Monday. They were eager to join any anti-Truman movement. Governor Tuck, the chairman of the delegation, indicated that Virginia would support Governor Ben T. Laney of Arkansas on the first ballot. When the roll was called, however, Senator Byrd cast Virginia’s twenty-six votes for his “beloved colleague,” Senator Richard B. Russell of Georgia. The nomination of President Truman and the adoption of the strong minority plank on civil rights made the convention an unhappy experience for the Virginia delegation. Fred Switzer, Virginia’s new Democratic National Committeeman, said he was “thoroughly disgusted with just about everything that happened at Philadelphia.” Senator Byrd called it a “terrible experience.” The Times-Dispatch described the convention as “A Gettysburg for Dixie.”

When the Democratic National Convention adjourned, the leaders of the Byrd Organization faced the question of what attitude to adopt toward the Truman-Barkley ticket. On July 22 Senator Willis Robertson announced that he would support the straight Democratic ticket. He made it clear that he opposed the civil-rights plank and the pledge to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act in the Democratic platform. E. R. Combs advised Senator Byrd on the presidential situation. He noted that “our friends over the State are sharply divided” on the support to be given the national ticket. He suggested that the State Central Committee should meet at an early date to adopt a more

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33 Wicker and Long’s statement that there would be no bolt.
34 Richmond News Leader, July 13, 1948; Richmond Times-Dispatch, July 14, 1948.
definite program and the Organization's most prominent leaders, such as Byrd and Tuck, "should probably decline to make a public statement with reference to the national situation." 37

Martin Hutchinson set about his plan to decipher the Organization's intentions in a letter to Chairman Massenburg. He requested information on plans for a campaign in support of President Truman. He hoped that a meeting of the State Central Committee would be called to organize "an active and aggressive [sic] campaign for all Democratic candidates." Massenburg informed Hutchinson that the Democratic State Central Committee would be called to meet "in the near future to make plans for a campaign.” Hutchinson replied that he stood ready to cooperate in every way in efforts to elect President Truman. Massenburg delayed his call for a meeting of the State Central Committee until September 16. The meeting was scheduled to take place in Richmond nine days later. 38

The long-awaited meeting of the Democratic State Central Committee on September 25 lasted seventeen minutes. Sidney Kellam, the treasurer of Princess Anne County, offered a resolution "to get out the full Democratic vote on November 2, 1948.” There was no discussion, and the resolution was adopted by a voice vote. Fred Switzer offered a resolution that the proceeds of the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner should be turned over to the treasurer of the Democratic State Central Committee, and not forwarded to the Democratic National Committee in Washington. Again there was no discussion, and the resolution was adopted unanimously. Robert Whitehead, Martin Hutchinson's ally, tried to speak. Chairman Massenburg ruled him out of order. He held that under the rules of the committee only members of the committee could take part in the session. It was not within his power to waive the rules and permit non-members to speak. Later, Whitehead, Hutchinson, Francis Pickens Miller, H. Maynor Sutherland, and Eugene H. McConnell issued a statement describing Massenburg's refusal "to recognize the ancient and fundamental right of petition” as "reminiscent of the actions of the royal Governors of Virginia.” Whitehead had desired to present a petition signed by ten Democrats calling for support of the Straight Democratic ticket. 39

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39 Richmond Times-Dispatch, September 26, 1948.
The unusual meeting of the Democratic State Central Committee convinced the anti-Organization leaders that a separate campaign for President Truman must be launched. Hutchinson declared, "It is manifest . . . that the Byrd-Tuck-Combs machine is now openly opposed to the National Democratic Party ticket." Whitehead informed National Chairman McGrath that an organization for Truman was being set up in Virginia. Hutchinson announced on October 2 the formation of the "Virginia Straight Democratic Ticket Committee." Two form letters were mailed. One went to the rank-and-file Democrats and the other to Democratic elected officials. Both letters stressed that the Straight Ticket Committee would be a temporary organization dedicated only to supporting the entire Democratic ticket in 1948. An organizational meeting was scheduled for October 9 at the Hotel John Marshall in Richmond.40

The Byrd Organization desired to hold its following together in preparation for the 1949 gubernatorial primary. Senator Robertson told Switzer about a conversation he had had with Combs. Combs and Robertson had agreed that Switzer and Massenburg should endorse Truman. T. Nelson Parker, an attorney in Richmond, would have active charge of a Truman headquarters in Richmond, and he would publicly announce his intention to vote for Truman. Robertson concluded, "We hope these steps will block the proposal to set up a separate Truman Headquarters in the State." "These steps," of course, were unsuccessful in attaining their objective. On October 13 Massenburg, the Democratic state chairman, issued the final official pronouncement of the Democratic Party of Virginia on the presidential campaign. It was a declaration of neutrality. He called for "a vigorous campaign" on behalf of Senator Robertson and the nine congressional nominees. In respect to the presidential contest, Massenburg declared, "The differences of opinion as to Presidential candidates are honest differences." "Many good Democrats" were supporting Truman while "many other good Democrats" were supporting Governor J. Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, the candidate of the National States' Rights, or "Dixiecrat" Party. Massenburg urged all Democrats whether they were supporting Truman or Thurmond to unite behind the party's congressional candidates. The state chairman affirmed that it was "One of the prime duties of the Chairman of the Party

40Ibid., September 28, October 3, 1948; Robert Whitehead to J. Howard McGrath, September 28, 1948, Hutchinson Papers. The form letters dated October 1, 1948, may be found in the Robert Whitehead Papers, University of Virginia Library.
. . . to unify and solidify the party within the state of Virginia. This I intend to do to the best of my ability."  

Senator Byrd and Governor Tuck pursued somewhat different courses of action during the campaign. The senator kept what he later called a "golden silence" throughout the campaign. While Governor Tuck did not endorse anyone, he did not remain inactive. When Governor Thurmond brought his States'-Rights campaign to Richmond, Tuck introduced him at the Atlantic Rural Exposition. The Times-Dispatch commented that in his introduction "Tuck endorsed virtually everything about Thurmond but his candidacy." Later Tuck recalled, "I was certainly at heart for Thurmond; in other words, I was positively opposed to Truman because of, among other things, his advocacy of the distasteful FEPC." On the evening of his visit to Richmond Governor Thurmond attended a banquet in his honor at the Hotel John Marshall. Governor Tuck was not present at the banquet, but Senator Byrd's wife, "Sittie," Delegate W. Tayloe Murphy of Warsaw, the treasurer of the Democratic State Central Committee, and several members of the General Assembly did attend the banquet. The day after Thurmond left Richmond former Representative Thomas Burch of the Fifth District announced his support of the States'-Rights ticket. He was the highest ranking member of the Organization to take this step.

The inactivity of the State Central Committee left the campaign for Truman in the hands of the Straight Ticket Committee and the small group of Organization men headed by Nelson Parker in Richmond. Parker's effort was a joint operation of the Richmond City Democratic Committee and the Richmond Young Democratic Club. The group set up a speakers bureau, organized in the precincts, and gave out publicity. The speakers bureau included Attorney General Almond and Representative J. Vaughan Gary. The Richmond headquarters confined its activities to the capital city and the surrounding area. In retrospect Parker thought that the effort did "accomplish something . . . in Richmond." President Truman, in fact, carried Richmond by 1,917 votes over Governor Thomas E. Dewey, his Re-

41 A. Willis Robertson to G. Fred Switzer, September 30, 1948, Switzer Papers; Statement of G. Alvin Massenburg, October 13, 1948, Hutchinson Papers.

42 The FEPC was the Fair Employment Practices Commission proposed by President Truman in his civil-rights message of February 2, 1948.

43 Wilkinson, Harry Byrd, p. 79; Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 9, 10, 1948; William M. Tuck to J. R. Sweeney, November 27, 1972.

44 Attorney General Almond in a speech at Norfolk urged Democrats to "remain in the house of our fathers, even though the roof leaks, and there may be bats in the belfry, rats in the pantry, a cockroach waltz in the kitchen and skunks in the parlor" (Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 12, 1948).
publican opponent. Henrico County which adjoins Richmond gave the president a plurality of 229 votes.46

The Truman-Barkley Straight Democratic Ticket Committee conducted the principal campaign for Truman in Virginia. The Committee organized for the uphill battle at the meeting in Richmond on October 9. Sixty persons from all sections of the state attended. They elected Robert Whitehead as chairman and Martin Hutchinson as campaign director. A campaign committee was set up. Each congressional district was represented by three members on the Committee. Several additional members were to direct campaign efforts at various groups, such as veterans, farmers, labor, and students. Whitehead and Hutchinson described Massenburg’s declaration of neutrality as a “new low in political cowardice.” 48

The Straight Democratic Ticket Committee had little money and only three weeks before election day to organize the state for Truman. Francis Pickens Miller contributed five hundred dollars, but much more was needed. Martin Hutchinson turned to the Democratic National Committee for help. He wrote Chairman McGrath, “It is highly important that we have buttons, pictures and other campaign literature sent immediately . . . to Richmond.” McGrath sent Hutchinson a note of thanks for the “real service” he was rendering, but probably fearful of going outside regular party channels in Virginia, the national chairman supplied no aid. Hutchinson again petitioned McGrath pointing out that he and his colleagues had “little time and little money” but would do “the very best we can under the circumstances.” On October 19 Hutchinson expressed his keen disappointment over “the few contributions which have come in to us.” The Democratic National Committee finally acted that same day to help President Truman’s friends. Whitehead received a check for one thousand dollars from William J. Primm, Chairman McGrath’s executive assistant. Whitehead acknowledged that the money would be “of great assistance to us.” He described the election as “an uphill one,” but added, “We have a chance.” 47

Francis Pickens Miller gave the principal address for the Straight Democratic Ticket Committee on October 28. He spoke over radio station WRVA

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45 Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 9, 13, 1948; Personal interview with T. Nelson Parker, April 3, 1972; Ralph Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, 1924-1968 (Charlottesville, 1971), pp. 166-167.
46 Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 10, 15, 1948.
47 Francis Pickens Miller to Emanuel Emroch, October 11, 1948, Martin A. Hutchinson to J. Howard McGrath, October 15, 1948, McGrath to Hutchinson, October 16, 1948, and Hutchinson to McGrath, October 18, 1948, Hutchinson to Clarence E. Magee, October 19, 1948, Hutchinson Papers; William J. Primm, Jr., to Robert Whitehead, October 19, 1948, Whitehead Papers; Whitehead to Primm, October 22, 1948, Hutchinson Papers.
in Richmond with a hookup for Roanoke and Bristol. He urged the election of the Truman-Barkley ticket, and scored the Organization for its indifference and for giving "aid and comfort to the Republicans." Even though the committee had received a rather large contribution from the National Democratic Party, Hutchinson complained that it had been "impossible to get money sufficient to put any number of speakers on the radio." 48

By late October it seemed that Virginia was going to support a Republican for president for the first time since 1928, when Hoover beat Smith. The Richmond News Leader published a statewide survey showing Dewey ahead on October 22. In the last days before the election, however, the race seemed to be getting closer. The final Gallup Poll published on November 2 gave Virginia to Dewey but by only one percent. James Latimer of the Times-Dispatch wrote that the lackluster campaign was the most doubtful presidential race in Virginia since 1928. The slight enthusiasm which any of the candidates aroused especially impressed him. Only three of the state's thirty daily newspapers supported President Truman. The three pro-Truman dailies were the Bristol Herald-Courier, the Bristol News-Bulletin, and the Waynesboro News-Virginian. The Roanoke and Norfolk newspapers advised readers to support Governor Dewey while the Staunton newspapers and the Alexandria Gazette endorsed Governor Thurmond's candidacy. The Richmond newspapers gave no editorial endorsement. Ironically the black weekly, the Norfolk Journal and Guide, endorsed Governor Dewey. The newspaper advised that the election of Truman would strengthen the position of anti-Negro members of Congress. The editorial criticized President Truman for de-emphasizing civil rights during the campaign. Dewey, on the other hand, was in the field of civil rights "way ahead . . . on things done and not merely promised and abandoned like an orphan on somebody's doorstep." 49

President Truman duplicated in Virginia the surprising victory he won in the nation as a whole. The vote totals in the Old Dominion were Truman 200,786 (47.9 percent); Dewey 172,070 (41.0); Thurmond 43,393 (10.4); Wallace 2,047 (0.5). James Latimer had written in the Times-Dispatch before the election that if Thurmond's votes were the difference between

48 Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 29, 1948; Martin A. Hutchinson to Lloyd Robinette, October 25, 1948, Hutchinson Papers.

49 Richmond News Leader, October 20, 22, 1948; Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 31, November 2, 1948, Norfolk Journal and Guide, October 30, 1948. The Roanoke newspapers were the Times and the World-News. The Norfolk dailies were the Virginia-Pilot and the Ledger-Dispatch. In Staunton the two newspapers were the News-Leader and the Evening-Leader.
Truman's carrying the state and losing it, the aim of the Tuck elections bill, that is to show that Virginia could no longer be taken for granted by the Democrats, would be achieved. Truman carried Virginia in spite of Thurmond's candidacy and the anti-Truman bill. As James J. Kilpatrick of the Richmond News Leader wrote, election night was "a bad night for the Byrd Organization." 50

In the aftermath of President Truman's stunning victory there were many who desired to claim credit for the president's success in Virginia. Many older Democrats believed that the tradition of straight-ticket voting was the overriding factor. State Chairman Massenburg said Truman's victory in Virginia was a result of the policy pursued by the State Central Committee. The voters had selected Truman along with the Democratic nominees for Congress. Robert Whitehead wrote that he "almost laughed" when he read Massenburg's comment. Martin Hutchinson interpreted the victory as a demonstration of loyalty to the Democratic Party as a "great institution." He remarked that this happened despite the "shameful desertion of the party by those who should have led the fight in its behalf." 51

The activities of the Truman-Barkley Straight Democratic Ticket Committee undoubtedly helped President Truman to carry Virginia. The pro-Truman operation in Richmond also aided the president. His margin of victory over Governor Dewey was only twenty-eight thousand votes. In 1944 Franklin D. Roosevelt had defeated Governor Dewey by ninety-seven thousand votes. Without any activity on his behalf, President Truman might well have lost Virginia. The Democratic State Central Committee did nothing for the president. The Democratic presidential candidate has carried Virginia only once since 1948. President Lyndon B. Johnson defeated Senator Barry M. Goldwater by 76,704 votes in 1964. In 1972 Richard M. Nixon polled 67.8 percent of the vote while his Democratic challenger, George McGovern, received only 30.1 percent. President Truman's narrow margin of victory in 1948 signified the beginning of the Old Dominion's movement away from the national Democratic Party. The attitude of the state's Democratic leadership, especially Senator Byrd's "golden silence," served to accelerate that movement.52

50 Eisenberg, Virginia Votes, pp. 161-164; Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 31, 1948; Richmond News Leader, November 3, 1948.
51 Richmond Times-Dispatch, November 4, 1948; Robert Whitehead to Martin A. Hutchinson, November 5, 1948, Whitehead Papers.