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PARTY ISSUES AND POLITICAL STRATEGY OF THE CHARLESTON TAYLOR DEMOCRATS OF 1848

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The significance of the presidential election of 1848 for the South has been the subject of much historical research. A popular Southern slaveholder and Mexican War hero, Zachary Taylor, managed to lure much rank and file support from the national Democratic party and carry the election for the Whigs, mainly with Southern help. In most cases the regular party organizations, even in the South, remained loyal to their respective candidates. Only in Charleston, South Carolina, nominally a Democratic stronghold, did party control break down.¹ There, despite the Democratic Executive Committee's support of Lewis Cass, a group of local Democratic politicians deserted the party and formed an organization known as the Taylor Democrats. Who were these Taylor Democrats? What issues did they argue, and what implications for the future of national parties can be derived from their rationalizations for supporting Taylor?

That a large segment of the Charleston Democratic party broke ranks to support Taylor was due in no small part to the political leadership of John C. Calhoun. Upon his return to the Democratic ranks in the late 1830s, his Whig opponents were forced to choose between taking sides in local Democratic squabbles and retiring at an early age.² Throughout the 1840s he maintained his strong control over state politics and projected a generally conservative image for South Carolina on the national political scene. In the mid-1840s a group of young, radical politicians in Charleston tired of appeasing the national party and considered deserting the Democrats during the presidential campaign of 1844. Their movement, called the Bluffton Movement, failed when Calhoun marshalled loyal party supporters to oppose them and thus

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¹ See Chaplain W. Morrison, *Democratic Politics and Sectionalism* (Chapel Hill, 1967), pp. 113, 169, 170-171; Joseph G. Rayback, *Free Soil: The Presidential Election of 1848* (Lexington, Ky., 1970); Nathaniel W. Stephenson, "Southern Nationalism in South Carolina, in 1851," *American Historical Review*, XXXVI (1931).

² Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun* (3 vols.; Indianapolis, 1944-1951), II, III.

ton harbor without stamped papers. But their captains paid fees that were identical with those required by the Stamp Act. Doubtless, if they had been challenged by customs officials in other ports, the captains would have pleaded their adherence to the spirit of the act where obedience to the literal requirements had been impossible. It is true that the Court of Common Pleas transacted business without stamped paper while the Stamp Act was presumed to be still in effect. But that business consisted of a single entry of judgment for debt in a suit of long standing, and the court explained that the Stamp Act itself recognized such a practice when stamps were unavailable. It is true that Chief Justice Shinner's objections were overridden by "packing" the court. But the court was authorized four assistant judges, and the three vacancies could legally be filled at any time. Moreover, Lieutenant Governor Bull secured consent for the appointments from a Council which included in attendance that day the Attorney General.

There were two keys to this cautious response by South Carolina. Perhaps fundamental to the outcome of the controversy was the friendly disposition of Lieutenant Governor Bull. Had either Boone or Montagu held the chief executive's position at the time, the struggle would have been bitter; judged by their actions in other crisis, either could have been expected to be intransigent, and there might well have been widespread violence. The other key factor was the unavailability of stamps. The designated officials refused to handle them, and Bull refused or failed to appoint others. As Shinner said, the unavailability was the province's fault, but the fact remains—there were no stamps for use. Had the stamps been available, South Carolina would have had to make a difficult choice of strategy. As it was, the province chose an easy and cautious way out. There was no point in defying law when law could be used to frustrate itself; there was no point in rebelling when rebellion was unnecessary.

preserve vested Democratic interests within the state.³ Still, local political jealousies had been allowed to surface. Perhaps another presidential election and a more appealing candidate could provide a better outlet for this animosity.

On March 9, 1847, Calhoun inadvertently set the Charleston Taylor Democrats firmly in motion and gave that faction its strategy for the campaign. Focusing his remarks on national issues and the Southern party he longed to see emerge, Calhoun diplomatically attempted to heal the growing rift among local Democratic candidates for office.⁴ He accused both national parties of turning against slavery and asked how the anti-slavery danger was to be repelled, yet he promised to let the citizens of Charleston determine their own plan of action. Perhaps selfishly or perhaps honestly, he refused to follow party nominations and pledged no support to the Democrats in the upcoming presidential election. His reasoning was simple: the national party structure was so evenly divided that it allowed abolitionists to hold a balance of power. Therefore both parties wooed the free-soilers. Calhoun's solution was to make the South a united power and force both parties to appease that section. He stated conclusively:

As both parties there [North] have united to divest us of our just and equal rights in the public domain, it is time that both parties with us should unite in resistance to so great an outrage . . . Henceforward, let all party distinctions among us cease. . . .⁵

Calhoun had the plan, but he had no means of implementing it and weakly concluded, "It is for you and the people of the slaveholding states, to determine what shall be done."⁶

The responses to Calhoun's speech were mixed, although there persisted a strong undercurrent of agreement with his animosity to national parties. South Carolina radicals, such as former governor James Henry Hammond and the novelist William Gilmore Simms, bitterly denounced the speech as personal presidential campaigning, and they

³ Chauncey S. Boucher, "The Annexation of Texas and the Bluffton Movement in South Carolina," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, VI, 12-19, 22-23.

⁴ Armisted Burt to Henry W. Conner, Feb. 1, 1847, Calhoun to Conner, Feb. 14, 1847, Henry Workman Conner Papers, Library of Congress; Henry W. DeSaussure to James Henry Hammond, March 13, 1847, William Gilmore Simms to Hammond, March 2, 1847, James Henry Hammond Papers, Library of Congress; Duff Green to Calhoun, March 6, 1847, Calhoun Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁵ Charleston *Mercury*, March 10, 1847.

⁶ *Ibid.*; see also Wiltse, III, 308, 320.

believed that Calhoun and the local politicians were merely solidifying their own state and national Democratic power.⁷ But other less sensitive observers interpreted Calhoun's speech as an endorsement of Zachary Taylor as an independent candidate for President. Richard K. Crallé, Calhoun's Virginia confidant, was convinced that the South Carolinian had thrown his support to Taylor. Henry W. Conner, already a forceful spokesman for Taylor, felt that Calhoun believed Taylor would be the next President, and his view prevailed among those Charlestonians who were moving toward a Taylor organization.⁸

While the pro-Democratic Charleston *Mercury* cynically hoped that the Whigs would nominate Taylor and thus force the Democrats to nominate a pro-slavery candidate, there is much evidence to show that Calhoun flirted with openly supporting Taylor. He congratulated Conner on redirecting *Mercury* policy toward Taylor as a means of achieving a Southern party and told Conner to consult with Ker Boyce and Franklin Harper Elmore on the strategy for organizing a Southern Taylor movement.⁹ To Joseph Lesesne, Calhoun reiterated that "the only chance for reformation is to break up the present party organization," and "that can only be done, by breaking up party machinery . . . and that, that can only be done by running as the people[']s candidate, one of wide spread popularity, like General Taylor."¹⁰

Many Charleston politicians took Calhoun's personal maneuvering seriously and seized his invitation to ingratiate themselves with Taylor in order to enhance their own political positions. But Democrats loyal to Calhoun and the party were suspicious of Taylor. Franklin H. Elmore felt that the general had too many Whig friends to make him friendly toward the Democratic party, and he advised Calhoun that Charleston Democrats were waiting to see where Taylor stood on the issue of national party conventions.¹¹ Both the *Mercury* and the Charleston

⁷ Hammond to Simms, March 21, 26, 1847, Simms to Hammond, March 29, April 2, 4, May 1, 1847, Beverly Tucker to Hammond, Hammond Papers.

⁸ Richard K. Crallé to Calhoun, April 18, 1847, in James Franklin Jameson (ed.), "Correspondence of John C. Calhoun," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1899* (Washington, 1900), II; Armisted Burt to Conner, July 3, 1847, Calhoun to Conner, May 14, 1847, Conner Papers.

⁹ For *Mercury* policy, see editorial of April 13, 1847. See Calhoun to Conner, May 14, Aug. 25, 1847, Conner Papers.

¹⁰ Calhoun to Joseph Lesesne, July 19, 1847, Calhoun Papers (photostat).

¹¹ Franklin H. Elmore to Calhoun, May 16, 1847, in Chauncey S. Boucher and Robert P. Brooks (eds.), "Correspondence Addressed to John C. Calhoun, 1837-1849," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association, 1929* (Washington, 1931); Calhoun to Elmore, Dec. 12, 1847, Calhoun Papers.

Courier, after first flirting with the Taylor people, firmly supported Calhoun's neutrality on the election.¹² Other Charlestonians disliked the candidacy of Lewis Cass, but they waited for Calhoun's views on the national Democratic candidate. When a city-wide Democratic conclave to discuss the presidential issue was called for June 6, plans for an organization to support Taylor were already under way.

The Taylor Democrats represented all ranges of the financial and political spectrum; the movement included radical fire-eaters, antibank planters, city merchants with strong bank ties, and many professional men.¹³ If one listens to the frustrated political commentary of Simms, it becomes evident that one of the goals of the Taylor movement was to destroy entrenched, or "Hunker," power, for Simms held the national Democratic party responsible for local Hunker control.¹⁴ The absence of a viable Whig party (James L. Petigru, Drs. Frederick Y. Porcher and Samuel Henry Dickson representing a party fragment) left no organization for the anti-Hunkers to join; they were forced to organize their own party. Taylor's candidacy was a convenient excuse, but these were ambitious men of some learning. The type of campaign they would run for Taylor was easily capable of rising above local political squabbles. With some of the city's older Democrats and the capable Gadsden-Conner-Boyce organization, they were at first able to work within the Democratic party framework, but later their strategy for a Taylor victory revealed an extra-party movement.

Whatever the mixture of reasons that brought the Taylor Democrats together, loyalty to Calhoun and hopes of continued political dominance in Charleston kept others within the Democratic camp, or at least forced a cautious neutrality. Armisted Burt tried to convince Conner to study the issues before formally endorsing Taylor, calling the Taylor movement indiscreet and divisive.¹⁵ Calhoun succeeded in keeping the Taylor forces out of the national Democratic convention, but he merely con-

¹² Conner to Calhoun, Jan. 17, 1848, Henry W. Gourdin to Calhoun, Jan. 17, 1848, Calhoun Papers.

¹³ For example, Ker Boyce, a banking colleague of Franklin Elmore but a support of planters against the railroad, joined with James Gadsden and Henry W. Conner, who were pro-railroad but directors of a rival bank, to lead the Taylor campaign. See Washington A. Clark, *History of Banking Institutions Organized in South Carolina Prior to 1860* (Columbia, S. C., 1922), pp. 196, 198; *Charleston Courier*, Feb. 9, March 25, 1848; Ker Boyce to Hammond, Oct. 8, 1847, Jan. 12, 1848, Hammond to Simms, Dec. 31, 1847, Hammond Papers.

¹⁴ Simms to Hammond Jan. 7, Nov. 22, 1847, M. Tuowey to Hammond, Feb. 4, 1847, Hammond Papers; *Charleston Southern Patriot*, Aug. 15, Dec. 1, 1846.

¹⁵ Burt to Conner, Jan. 20, 1848, Conner Papers.

vinced Conner of the bankers' fears that South Carolinians were too close to the Democratic party.¹⁶ By backing away from his veiled endorsement of Taylor and his refusal to support Cass, Calhoun further divided Charleston politics on the presidential issue and forced the issue of party loyalty to a head.

With the unwitting assistance of the Democrats, Conner and the Taylorites used delay to consolidate their movement around the issue of party loyalty. For Conner the implications of the anti-convention movement signalled the "necessity of definite and combined action of some sort amongst the Southern states and in which So. Ca. will play her part."¹⁷ After the Democrats had nominated Cass and before the Whig convention had met, both of Charleston's newspapers aided the Taylorites by condemning Cass.¹⁸ Burt wrote Conner of a scheme for making Taylor an independent candidate, but Conner seemed no longer interested in who supported Taylor, as long as Cass and the Democrats were defeated. Henry Bailey, a Calhoun lieutenant, reported that the young politicians of Charleston were clamoring for immediate action, although Boyce and Conner were trying to use their enthusiasm constructively. Burt warned Conner to confine the Democratic meeting of June 6 to "killing off . . . the Baltimore Convention," but he was too late.¹⁹ At the meeting, following a great deal of confused but heated debate, a motion to support Taylor was tabled, and those in attendance decided to "watch" the Democrats and "wait" upon the Whig convention. The *Mercury* praised this course, while damning the attempt to force Taylor on the Charleston Democrats.²⁰ But the Taylor Democratic party had been launched, and the campaign to prepare Charleston for endorsement of Taylor had begun.

Between June 6 and July 20, when the Taylor Democrats became a formal political organization, many issues were discussed and a tentative strategy emerged. For example, Taylorites believed that the support of a popular election of presidential electors was one means of arousing support from the people of Charleston. They blamed the state legislature for refusing to reform the process of choosing electors, because the state's power structure controlled the legislature and wanted as little

¹⁶ Burt to Conner, March 28, 29, 1848, Conner Papers; Calhoun to Conner, April 6, 1848, Calhoun Papers, Charleston Library Society.

¹⁷ Conner to Calhoun, April 13, 1848, in Jameson (ed.), "Correspondence of Calhoun."

¹⁸ *Mercury*, May 30, June 1, 1848; *Courier*, June 1, 1848.

¹⁹ Burt to Conner, May 28, June 3, 1848, Conner Papers; Henry W. Bailey to Calhoun, June 2, 1848, in Boucher and Brooks (eds.), "Correspondence to Calhoun."

²⁰ *Mercury*, June 6, 7, July 15, 1848; *Courier*, June 7, 1848.

power as possible in the hands of the people. The Taylor forces also pointed out that for years the state's political leaders had complained of national Democratic restraints on their activities; but when the party had been in trouble locally they had rallied to its support, proving conclusively the power of the national party in controlling local actions. The author of *Charleston and Her Satirists*, a pro-Taylor tract, claimed that if the Democratic party could be purged from the South, then Calhoun would be free to support a Southern party.²¹ The Taylorites appealed to local pride to oppose the controlling power of the national party.

On July 20 the Taylorites formally launched their own organization and clearly distinguished themselves from both the local and the national Democrats. Writing in the *Courier*, "South" explained the Taylorites' desire to create a sectional movement:

Our platform is, the safety and rights of the South. We desire to harmonize all parties here in the common cause—we do not, as seems the *Mercury*, seek to preserve *party lines* and *party integrity*. Party difference, organizations, and aspirations at the South have hitherto been our bane, . . . And, in truth, between Southern Whigs and Democrats, the difference has been more one of party than principle.²²

While there was much romantic praise for the military hero-slaveholder, Taylor was mainly extolled as a man above party. The issue of Democratic policy toward slave expansion was considered important in the election, as the Taylorites claimed their support of Taylor was to "rise superior to the trammel of the mere name of a party—a party declining openly to defend the great principle of equality among the States."²³ M. I. Keith, the featured speaker of the evening, attacked the Baltimore Convention and pronounced Cass and the Northern Democrats unsafe on all issues concerning the South.²⁴ The Taylorites blamed the Democratic party for nominating a candidate so unsatisfactory to Southern radicals and proposed an alternative means of protecting Southern interests.

The *Mercury* had warned against this meeting, and "A Thinking Democrat" had advised the Taylorites to withdraw from the Democratic party, probably in hopes of dividing the organization. The writer cautioned them to "pause before you cause a schism of the Democratic

²¹ William Gilmore Simms, *Charleston and Her Satirists* (Charleston, 1848), 3, 11, 50-55; *Courier*, June 28, 1848.

²² *Courier*, July 20, 1848; also see *Courier*, June 20, 1848; B. Tucker to Hammond, June 12, 1848, Hammond Papers.

²³ *Mercury*, July 21, 1848; *Courier*, July 21, 1848; *Palo Alto*, Aug. 5, 1848.

²⁴ *Palo Alto*, Aug. 5, 1848; *Columbia South Carolinian*, July 28, 1848.

party, and find yourselves excommunicated from your old friends and suspected as ambitious and designing Whigs." ²⁵ But warning against party division was just no substitute for forceful and positive action, and the loyal Democrats had vacillated too long. The Taylorites had set the stage for a divisive political confrontation between two branches of the same party over the issue of loyalty to the national party.

The absence of a viable two-party system explains why and how South Carolinians were able to wage such a vigorous intra-party dispute. The results of Taylor's Whig nomination show clearly that in the presidential campaign, party leaders outside of South Carolina reverted to partisan politics. For example, Alabama Democrats, once skeptical, came out for Cass. With competitive parties, the Alabama politicians felt they had more to gain from party solidarity. The state campaign revolved around which candidate was best for the South; the national party system was not an issue. Time and again, party loyalty actually subverted any chance of internecine warfare. The parties fought each other, remained consistent with their respective candidates, and refused to debate the merits of national party commitments. The strength of two-party organizations actually postponed issues of support for an independent Southern candidate. Although party loyalty before the convention designations seemed weak, during the actual campaign all the Southern states except South Carolina failed to question national parties as instruments for Southern protection. ²⁶ Only in one-party South Carolina could a viable Taylor Democratic movement actually use the general as an instrument for Southern strategy.

Although the Taylor forces were unable to remain united for long, a hard core continued the campaign and reacted against the indecisiveness of the opposition. Without favorable press coverage they had to begin their own paper. The Taylor newspaper, printed by J. B. Nixon,

²⁵ *Mercury*, July 21, 1848; *Courier*, Aug. 1, 3, 1848.

²⁶ See Malcolm C. McMillan, "Taylor's Presidential Campaign in Alabama, 1847-1848," *The Alabama Review*, XIII (April, 1960), 96, 97, 100, 102, 104, 108; Richard Harrison Shyrock, *Georgia and the Union in 1850* (Durham, N. C., 1926), 163, 166, 169, 175, 176; Paul Murray, *The Whig Party in Georgia, 1825-1853* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 133, 138; James Kimmons Greer, *Louisiana Politics, 1845-1861* (Baton Rouge, 1930), 54; Herbert J. Doherty, *The Whigs of Florida, 1845-1854*, University of Florida Monographs, *Social Service*, No. 1, Winter, 1959, 28-29; Clarence Clifford Norton, *The Democratic Party in Ante-Bellum North Carolina, 1835-1861* (Chapel Hill, 1930), 143-144; Henry T. Shanks, *The Secession Movement in Virginia, 1847-1861* (Richmond, 1934), 23-24. Also see Brain G. Walton, "The Elections for the Thirtieth Congress and the Presidential Candidacy of Zachary Taylor," *Journal of Southern History*, XXXV May, 1969), 190, 200-201.

appeared on Wednesday, August 6, 1848, as the *Palo Alto*. Published twice a week throughout the campaign, under unnamed editors but with the advice and writing skills of Simms, Gadsden, and other Taylorites, the *Palo Alto* became the organ for a new local political organization.²⁷ The editors of *Palo Alto* basked in the atmosphere of a beleaguered group of honest politicians, formed only to discuss the issues of the presidency, and indirectly the role of national parties in the future of the South.

The Taylor group seized upon a *Mercury* editorial's accusation of party disloyalty and launched a counterattack which questioned loyalty to national parties and focused on the shortcomings of the Democratic party itself. Writing in *Palo Alto*, "McDuffie" claimed the Taylor people were forced to leave the party because it no longer was responsive to South Carolina's needs. Proclaiming no attachment to either party, "McDuffie" urged both Southern Whigs and Democrats to discontinue their national allegiances.²⁸ A *Palo Alto* editorial stated unequivocally, "Our position is that the safety of the South is not to be found in party."²⁹ There was no attempt to deny the *Mercury's* accusation that the Taylorites plotted to destroy the national effectiveness of the Democratic party.

The *Palo Alto* and other Taylorites were having their desired effect on the *Mercury*, as that paper became increasingly defensive of the Democrats and prepared to announce for Cass. Refusal to abandon the Democrats was also reflected in the belief that the South controlled the Democratic party, and that its effectiveness in that party was being challenged by Southerners who bolted the party ranks. "Crawford" alleged that Taylor had become a symbol for a Southern party: "This is done, says their advocate, to abolish old party lines and form a new Southern party. Are the *Whigs* in their *counsels* in this *proposal of abolishing distinctions and forming a new party?*"³⁰ "Crawford" blamed the local Taylorites for believing the Whigs, but he also implied that the Taylor forces were actually attacking the concept of national parties and thus damaging the South's position within the Democratic party.

²⁷ The author owes a debt to Mr. E. L. Inabinett of the South Caroliniana Library for helping him discover this significant newspaper. Gadsden to Hammond, Sept. 15, 1848, Simms to Hammond, July 20, 1848, Hammond to Simms, July 26, 1848, Hammond Papers; *Courier*, Aug. 7, 1848.

²⁸ *Palo Alto*, Aug. 5, 1848; also see Simms to Hammond, July 29, 1848, Hammond Papers; *Courier*, Aug. 7, 1848.

²⁹ *Palo Alto*, Aug. 12, 1848.

³⁰ *Mercury*, Aug. 7, 1848. For similar statements, see *Mercury*, July 26, 27, Aug. 3, 4, 1848.

While it is doubtful that the Taylorites at this point fully understood the implications of "Crawford's" message, the *Mercury* clearly recognized the threat they posed to South Carolina's position in the Democratic party.

The response of the Taylor Democrats was at first weak. Whether Taylor himself was opposed to political parties, whether the Democrats were as antagonistic to compromise on the territorial question as were the Whigs, whether Cass favored the Wilmot Proviso—these were hardly important campaign issues. But the idea that the Democratic party was weak on the territorial question soon led to a fixation upon that party as the enemy of the South. An important editorial in the *Palo Alto* on August 16 asked, "Should we break with the Democrats?" and answered its own question by saying, "The Democratic party has shown that it will not, cannot aid us."⁸¹ "Brutus" concluded, "Our position is that both Northern parties, *as parties*, are unsound and unreliable upon the great question of Southern rights. Parties are becoming geographical."⁸²

Both the *Mercury's* actual endorsement of Cass and the meeting of the Democratic Executive Committee on August 21 to purge the Taylorites from the party were anticlimactic. Expressing loyalty to the national party the Rhett-led *Mercury* explained its endorsement of Cass as mainly anti-Whig. Obviously the *Mercury* feared the implications of the loss of Southern control of the Democratic party. The strategy of the Elmore-Rhett group was to encourage moderation and harmony "by rallying a great Southern party that will support no man not pledged to the maintenance of the rights of the South and the guarantees of the Constitution."⁸³ Explaining why the Charleston Democratic Executive Committee endorsed Cass, a *Mercury* editorial stated that "the necessity has been forced upon them by the nomination of General Taylor in their midst, and the organization of a party to advance his election."⁸⁴ Personality clashes and mutual recriminations forced both groups to clarify the issues and their strategies to justify their respective candidates. The activities of the Democratic party forced the Taylorites to make the meaning of their veiled attack on national parties more precise.

Until the local elections were over, hardly a day passed without the *Mercury's* questioning the loyalty of Taylor and his Charleston supporters to the South. Once Taylor had accepted the Whig nomination,

⁸¹ *Palo Alto*, Aug. 16, 1848; also see A. P. Aldrich to Hammond, Aug. 20, 1848, Hammond Papers.

⁸² *Palo Alto*, Aug. 12, 1848.

⁸³ *Mercury*, Aug. 21, 1848.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1848.

it was obvious to the *Mercury* that internal dissention endangered the future of the Democratic party in the South. "Low Country" wrote that Taylor was unsafe on all Southern principles and accused the Taylorites of supporting the Wilmot Proviso. One writer added that the Taylorites' use of the name "Democracy" was hypocritical and asked, "Why not declare that you design a *dissolution of the Union*, and hold no communion with our Confederate States?"³⁵ The *Courier*, usually silent, printed letters attacking Taylor's candidacy; one letter pointed out that the primary purpose of the Taylorites was to destroy the Democratic party in the South.³⁶

A *Palo Alto* editorial disregarded the charge that the Taylorites had become Whiggish in their policies and frankly admitted that part of their support for Taylor was to lure Southern Whigs into a united Southern party. "The Union of the South" admitted little faith in any national presidential candidate and considered the campaign an excuse to build a Southern party. A baiting editorial entitled "The Issue before Us" mentioned the dangerous influence of strict party organization, which forced Southern Cass supporters into the free-soil camp. Colonel John Cunningham stated that Taylor supporters in Charleston were beginning to move toward the formation of a Southern party.³⁷ Restating their battle for a principle and not for a man, the Taylor forces actually believed that their campaign had broken the unity of Democratic sentiment in the South.

The personal political maneuvering of the Taylorites centered not on Taylor's Southernness but on the general's usefulness to the Southern party. James Gadsden confided to Hammond that "I have been more confirmed in the necessity at once of dissolving all our Northern obligations, . . . and of rallying under a Southern Union—on the paramount question the Southern Wigs [*sic*] are with us." Gadsden also praised the *Palo Alto* editorials, whose prime concern was to use the Taylor campaign to avoid absorption in the "Great Democratic party of the North—who . . . desert us when in power." The effect which a Southern party strategy based on Taylor's campaign would have on Southern Democrats was summarized by Gadsden: "Support Taylor on the avowed object we have proclaimed, and instead of going to the Wigs [*sic*],

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Sept. 5, 1848; also see Sept. 6, and Benjamin Whitner to Hammond, Sept. 20, 1848, Hammond Papers.

³⁶ *Courier*, Sept. 14, 1848.

³⁷ For the various arguments, see *Palo Alto*, Aug. 26, 30, Sept. 6, 1848; Cunningham was quoted in *Palo Alto*, Sept. 13, 1848. Also see *Palo Alto*, Sept. 2, 1848.

we ultimately bring the Southern Wigs [*sic*] to us and produce that Union in the Slave States.”³⁸ “Vindicator” in the *Mercury* supported neither candidate but understood what the Taylor Democrats had accomplished. He stated, “If the formation of a Southern party is a bitter dose for party leaders in Charleston, as is evident, let them thank their own *obstinate* adherence to their own opinions, their *want of respect* for the opinions of others.”³⁹

But if a Southern party was the strategy, the Taylor Democratic offensive against Cass and the national Democrats demonstrated the means for achieving that party. Gadsden claimed there could be no Southern confidence in Cass because he was a Democrat, and the Democrats deceived the South. Simms condemned Cass as a mere tool of a party which was no longer acceptable to the South. Another *Palo Alto* editorial summed up the attack on party and Cass: “How,” said “The Issue before Us,” “can one measure allegiance to South Carolina by the standard of the Democratic party?”⁴⁰

Aside from indulging in mutual recriminations, both sides attempted to lure Calhoun and other important public figures to support their candidates.⁴¹ The *Mercury* forces settled on keeping Calhoun neutral and reprinted his statement of opposition to both candidates.⁴² Gadsden, the leader of the Taylor party, told Calhoun that his support would unite the state behind Taylor and lead to the creation of a Southern party. But all the Taylorites’ arguments, no matter how appealing to Calhoun’s vanity or his desire to become the powerful leader of a Southern party, were unable to sway him. Therefore the Taylorites employed an alternative strategy, making Calhoun a martyr to the Southern cause and depicting the national Democracy as a monster. “McDuffie” claimed that Taylor planned a Southern cabinet headed by Calhoun in order to combat the free-soil Democrats. He also asked why

³⁸ Gadsden to Hammond, Aug. 19, 1848, Aug. 4, 1848, Hammond Papers; see also Andrew G. Magrath to Hammond, Aug. 1848, Hammond Papers.

³⁹ *Mercury*, Sept. 18, 1848. Also see *Mercury*, Sept. 16, 1848.

⁴⁰ Gadsden to Hammond, Aug. 4, 1848, Hammond Papers; Simms was quoted in *Courier*, Sept. 16, 1848; *Palo Alto*, Sept. 6, 1848.

⁴¹ For example, see attempt to persuade Hammond to take sides in James M. Walker to Hammond, Aug. 22, 1848, S. W. Trotti to Hammond, Sept. 25, 1848, Hammond Papers; *Mercury*, Aug. 31, 1848; *Courier*, Aug. 26, 1848; Hammond *Diary*, Sept. 22, 1848, p. 49, Hammond Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina.

⁴² *Mercury*, Sept. 14, 1848, from a letter to the *Mercury* of Sept. 5. See also Robert B. Rhett to Elmore, Sept. 6, 1848, Franklin Harper Elmore Papers, Library of Congress.

the Southern Democrat Henry Foote had summarily dismissed Calhoun from the Democratic party, and warned, "People of Charleston, friends of Calhoun, keep your eyes upon the Cass Wing of the Charleston Democracy!"⁴³ A *Palo Alto* editorial of September 9 entitled "Our Present Position" claimed that the Cass Democrats were resentful of Calhoun's power in South Carolina and predicted that Cass's election would destroy Calhoun's national career, thus tying South Carolina's once independent power to the policies of the Northern and Western Democrats. Even accusing local Democrats of threatening Calhoun, an article concluded, "The triumph of *Cassdom* with us, is his [Calhoun's] downfall and the indissoluble connection of the State with the rabid Free Soil party of the North and West."⁴⁴

At a Taylor meeting in early October, Andrew G. Magrath partially explained his hopes for the success of the party in the local election. He spoke of the union of the South for sectional defense as being a realizable fact if only Southern politicians participated in "harmonizing the elements that surround us."⁴⁵ The last issue of the *Palo Alto* disputed the Cassites' reasons for remaining loyal to the national party system. An editorial denounced national parties for coercing people of South Carolina into supporting candidates who misrepresented Southern interests.⁴⁶ A strategy which was neither pro-Taylor nor Democratic resulted in a sweeping local victory for the Taylor forces. The *Mercury* interpreted the outcome as due to the vulnerability of the national Democrats. However, the paper concluded: "We must not, then, trust too much to any party or men at the North."⁴⁷

With hopes of reconciliation after the local victory, the Taylorites called a meeting to discuss unifying Charleston on the basis of mutual hostility to the Democratic party. Leaving no doubt as to why his party had supported the Southern general, Magrath waxed eloquent of the hopes of a new party founded to create "union among ourselves." He called for an end to local squabbles and pledged to turn the Taylor movement into a party for the entire South. To achieve harmony

⁴³ Gadsden to Calhoun, Aug. 19, 1848, Calhoun Papers, University of South Carolina (all photostats); *Palo Alto*, Aug. 1848; see *Mercury* response, Aug. 28, 1848, *Palo Alto*, Sept. 6, 1848.

⁴⁴ *Palo Alto*, Sept. 9, 16, 1848; for response, see *Mercury*, Sept. 21, 11, 25, 29, 1848.

⁴⁵ *Mercury* Oct. 7, 1848; *Courier*, Oct. 9, 1848.

⁴⁶ *Palo Alto*, Oct. 7, 1848.

⁴⁷ *Mercury*, Oct. 16, 1848; the election returns were printed in the *Courier*, Oct. 11, 12, 1848. The Taylorites elected the state senator, captured 13 seats in the state house, and returned Isaac Holmes to Congress.

and effective resistance, the Taylor movement organized a committee of twenty-one and an executive committee of fifty members to serve as permanent liaison to the rest of the South. Pointedly, Magrath stated that the movement had no obligation or loyalty to Taylor. The tenth resolution of the meeting reiterated the Taylorites' purpose in the campaign: "We respectfully invite the people of the several Districts of the State, one and all to organize themselves, as we propose to do, in a great '*Southern State Rights Republican Party*,' pledged to each other."⁴⁸

Even before the national election results were in, the idea of a new party filled the pages of Taylorite correspondence. Simms expressed the desire for an independent state party movement but feared South Carolina's taking the lead. He planned to continue to encourage the Young Carolina movement as a secession party and feared the moderating consequences of a Southern convention. Henry W. Conner believed the previous campaign had been above party and candidate. He told Hammond that "a united action on the part of the South is . . . possible and beyond all question desirable." Conner also told Hammond that the committee of twenty-one had begun to work for a Southern party. John Cunningham, another Taylorite, confided to Calhoun his impressions of the Taylor meeting. He said:

You have no doubt observed that our party here [those who preferred Taylor to Cass] have since the election reorganized as a '*Southern State Rights Republican*' party, . . . to break down among ourselves those party influences which are shackling our free and manly resistance as an insulted and injured people.⁴⁹

When the South Carolina legislature met to elect presidential electors in November, its vote for Cass was a foregone conclusion. The customary disputes over the popular election of electors and the bank found Cass and Taylor supporters on both sides. Local issues were apparently of secondary importance to the national issues raised in the Charleston campaign, for the legislature spent much time debating the idea of Southern union through a Southern convention. Evaluating the importance of the thirteen state legislators elected from Charleston, Conner said that without the encumbrances of national parties, the politicians of South Carolina were ready for action. In the spirit of the

⁴⁸ Magrath's speech was printed in the *Mercury*, Nov. 2, 1848; *Courier*, Nov. 2, 1848.

⁴⁹ Mary C. Simms Oliphant *et al* (eds.), *The Letters of William Gilmore Simms* (5 vols.; Columbia, S. C., 1952-1956), II, 453, 448-449; Conner to Hammond, Nov. 2, 1848, Hammond Papers, LC; Conner to Calhoun, Cunningham to Calhoun, in Jameson (ed.), "Correspondence of Calhoun," 1184-1186.

mood at Columbia, Calhoun said, "There can be no doubt, that the time has *arrived*, when we must make up our mind, to give up our slaves, or give up all political connection . . . with either of the existing parties at the North."⁵⁰

Clearly the election of 1848 questioned the credibility of the Democratic party's importance to antebellum South Carolina, and indirectly to the entire South. The co-operation movement of 1851-1852, which eventually reunited the dissenting Democrats in South Carolina, continued the movement away from national parties. Leading Taylor Democrats such as Magrath, W. D. Porter, and Henry W. Pringle, were in the vanguard of the co-operation movement, as they found Robert Barnwell Rhett's plan for single state secession precipitant. Throughout the summer of 1851, ex-Taylorites continued their attack on the national Democratic party's control of the South and sought to unite the state on co-operation. Many of them, members from the 1848 committee of twenty-one, agreed with the elderly Langdon Cheves that only a Southern party could direct united Southern action. The South Carolina convention of 1852 voted against single state action and passed a Taylorite resolution for Southern unity through a Southern party.⁵¹

The issues over party in Charleston in 1848 concerned the strategy for best achieving a Southern union. That South Carolina eventually rejoined a national Democratic party which would be permanently weakened by the spectre of Southern control in no way diminishes the importance of the Taylor Democrats. A writer in the *Southern Quarterly Review* five years later best assessed the Taylor movement. Unmercifully attacking the Democratic party, the author concluded, "But the effect of his election was in one respect beneficial. It farther taught the Democratic party the necessity of frankness" and forever weakened it as a national party.⁵² The next time Charleston Democrats refused to support

⁵⁰ Conner to Hammond, Nov. 20, 1848, Hammond Papers, LC; also see *Journal of the House of Representatives of the State of South Carolina, 1848* (Columbia, 1849) and *Journal of the Senate of the State of South Carolina, 1848* (Columbia, 1849).

⁵¹ *Proceedings of the Great Southern Co-operation and Anti-Secession Meeting Held in Charleston, September 23, 1851* (Charleston, 1851); *Proceedings of the Cooperation and Southern Rights Meeting, Charleston, S. C., July 29, 1851* (Charleston, 1851), p. 1; Harold S. Schultz, *Nationalism and Sectionalism in South Carolina, 1852-1860* (Durham, 1950), chap. ii; *Journal of the State Convention of South Carolina, 1852* (Columbia, S. C., 1852), 18-19; Chauncey S. Boucher, "Secession and Co-operation Movement in South Carolina, 1848-1852," *Washington University Studies, April, 1918*, Vol. V, No. 2 (St. Louis, 1919), 138.

⁵² *Southern Quarterly Review*, Vol. VIII, n. s., July, 1853, 28-29.

the national Democratic party's nominee was in 1860. The young men who had devised a strategy in 1848 were no longer young in 1860, and their strategy had also seasoned. Old Taylor Democrats now acted with the entire South, and again the national Democratic party was their object of destruction.