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THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF WISCONSIN
GERMANS, 1854-60

BY
ERNEST BRUNCKEN

[From Proceedings of The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1901]

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STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF WISCONSIN
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THE POLITICAL ACTIVITY OF WISCONSIN GERMANS, 1854-60

BY ERNEST BRUNCKEN.¹

While the principal parties opposing each other were the Democrats and the Whigs, the German voters of Wisconsin were on the side of the former almost with unanimity. But as the question of slavery assumed greater proportions in the public mind, more and more of the Germans became dissatisfied with the treatment of that question by the Democratic party. In 1848 German votes helped the new Free-soil party to gain its partial victory in the state. The great majority of the Germans, however, notwithstanding their entire lack of sympathy with the slave-holders, remained Democrats until the outbreak of the War of Secession and even longer. To understand this apparent contradiction it will be necessary to dwell for a moment on the characteristics of the different political parties during the decade preceding the war, and see how they would present themselves to immigrants from Germany.

Before the slavery question became a disturbing factor, the Whigs may be described as the party of those who felt that there was such a thing as an American nation, with an individuality and characteristics of its own, distinct from those of every other nation. These people were of the opinion, more or less clearly realized, that the genesis of this nation was already accomplished, that its nature and essential character were fixed, and that the only thing left for further development was the expansion of these fixed characteristics and their adaptation to the growth of the country, without, however, changing them in any

¹ Address presented at the Wisconsin state historical convention at Milwaukee, Oct. 12, 1901.

important respect. As most of the Whigs had come to Wisconsin from New England, or those portions of the Middle states in which the New England element was prevalent, they practically identified this American national character with the only kind of Americanism they knew, that of New England. They intended to reproduce in Wisconsin, as nearly as possible, the institutions, together with the customs, popular views, and prejudices of their native section. To this party, also, were attracted all who were economically interested in resisting tendencies towards equality—the wealthy, the protectors of vested interests, and finally, the believers in a strong government. Whigs were the promoters of measures tending to uphold the New England social customs, the Puritan Sabbath, temperance legislation, Protestant religious instruction in the public schools. By their opponents they were called aristocrats, and there was just enough truth in this appellation to make it politically dangerous. It was natural that a party, the members of which were so conscious of their national individuality, should assume a position of antipathy, if not hostility, to the foreign immigrants, whose national characteristics were so different from their own. They feared that their own peculiar customs and institutions would be modified by the influence of these newcomers, and that in the end the American people would come to be something quite different from what they wished.

The Democratic party, on the other hand, embraced first of all those whose minds were less influenced by national peculiarities and predilections, and more by that body of ideas concerning liberty and equality which one may roughly call the Jeffersonian doctrines—a set of opinions essentially cosmopolitan rather than national. In the second place, to the Democratic standard flocked all those elements which everywhere consisted of the admirers of Jackson—the masses who conceived Democracy to represent the common people as against the wealthy. The Jeffersonians were friendly toward the immigrants by reason of their principles; the masses sympathized with the foreigners because the latter were, like themselves, poor, and had the same economic interests.

Under these circumstances it is not at all surprising that not only the Germans, but also the Irish and other foreigners allied themselves with the Democratic party. There they found less disposition to interfere with their customs regarding the keeping of Sunday, the use of beer and wine, and similar things which may appear of small account to the highly educated, but are of great importance to the masses who have few sources of enjoyment. Among the Democrats also they found a willingness to allow them to participate in all the political rights and privileges of the native citizen.

Moreover, the educated portion of the foreigners, and particularly the German "Forty-eighters," found that the doctrines of Jefferson, the Democratic sage, were identical with those for which they had fought in their native land and for which they had been driven into exile.

When the slavery question became uppermost, it was especially this latter class, the political exiles and their sympathizers, who felt themselves in an uncomfortable predicament. They were Democrats because in that party they found the bulwark of liberty and equality; and now they saw that same party become the main support of a system than which nothing could be imagined more abhorrent to Jeffersonian doctrines. When the Republican party was organized, the majority of the "Forty-eighters" rallied around its banner, and together with the old Free-soilers formed what may be called the Jeffersonian wing of the new party. The greater part, however, of the Republican voters came out of the camp of the old Whigs. In coming together to form the new organization, the two wings did not propose to give up their respective principles as they had held them before the slavery question came to the fore. The only thing which united them, was their common opposition to the spread of slavery into free territory.

That this view of the nature of German Republicanism is correct, becomes evident from the perusal of a speech by Carl Schurz, given at Albany Hall in Milwaukee, during the campaign for the election of Byron Paine as justice of the supreme court in 1859. Schurz was then the acknowledged leader of the German Republicans of the state, and his views may be

taken as typical of those of most of this element. The particular phase of the anti-slavery struggle which was then before the public, was the fugitive slave law, which had twice been declared unconstitutional by the supreme court of Wisconsin. The United States supreme court, however, had reversed the decisions of the state tribunal, much to the disgust of the more violent anti-slavery men.¹ Schurz, in discussing these questions, took occasion to analyze the relation of the state to the federal government, which he did in the most approved style of the states' rights school. He praised the Virginia and Kentucky resolutions, and his highest constitutional authority was Calhoun. The federal government seemed to him a dangerous animal, which if not chained tight by strict construction of the constitution, would devour the last trace of self-government and liberty.²

The consequences which this speech, strange as coming from the lips of a professed Republican, had upon Mr. Schurz's political career, will be treated of later. It is mentioned in this place only to show the antagonism which must have existed between the German wing of the Republicans and its Whig associates.

While the "Forty-eighters," who were new-comers and had no previous alliances with the Democratic party, threw themselves into the struggle against slavery with all the ardor with which in their old home they had fought against the absolute and pseudo-constitutional governments, the older leaders of the Wisconsin Germans remained true to the Democratic party that had stood by the foreigners in their fight for political equality with the natives. Their arguments against the Republicans were based on the ground that the new party, as the successor of Whigs and Knownothings, had inherited their principles; that it was hostile to foreign-born citizens, favoring Puritan Sabbath observance and prohibition of the liquor traffic, and was generally the enemy of all human liberty and progress. These arguments, like the charge of aristocratic tendencies

¹ See *In re Booth*, 3 Wis., 1; *In re Booth and Rycroft*, 3 Wis., 145; *U. S. vs. Booth*, 18 How., 476; 21 How., 506.

² *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 28, 1859.

against the old Whigs, did not entirely lack truth, and by their means the Democrats succeeded in keeping the greater part of the German voters true to their banner, notwithstanding their almost universal opposition to the slavery system.

Having in this necessarily brief and unsatisfactory manner described the general character of the political life among the German voters of the period, I will now relate in some detail the part which Germans took in the political affairs of Wisconsin from the organization of the Republican party to the outbreak of the War of Secession. I make no pretensions to exhaustiveness. The material I have had at hand has been almost exclusively of a printed nature, principally the newspapers of the time. But very few of the files of the German newspapers of those years are at present accessible. Many have probably perished forever.

On the thirteenth day of July, 1854, a mass convention was held at Madison for the purpose of organizing the new Republican party. As far as I have been able to discover, the only Germans attending were Karl Roeser,¹ of Manitowoc, A. H. Biel-feld,² Dr. Charles E. Wunderly,³ and Christian Essellen⁴ of

¹ Karl Roeser was born in Germany in 1809, became a lawyer, took part in the abortive revolutionary movements of 1830, was imprisoned for high treason, but soon pardoned, and continued to practice his profession. Taking part in the renewed revolution of 1848, he was again sentenced to imprisonment, but succeeded in escaping and made his way to America. In 1853 he founded the Manitowoc *Demokrat*, which from the first was strongly anti-slavery. In 1861 he was appointed to a position in the treasury department, which he held until near his death, continuing at the same time to write for many German newspapers, especially the Washington *Volkstribun*. He died in Washington on November 14th, 1897.

² A. H. Biel-feld was born at Bremen, Germany, on June 20, 1818. He came to the United States in 1836, spent a year or two in Mexico, came back to this country and settled in Wisconsin in 1843. He was the first city clerk of Milwaukee.

³ Dr. C. E. Wunderly was born on December 6, 1818, received an education as physician and surgeon in German schools and universities, emigrated to Texas, and in 1845 came to Wisconsin. He died February 22, 1859.

⁴ Christian Essellen took part in the revolutionary movements of 1848, and had to go into exile in consequence. He published the first German

Milwaukee. The Germans of the latter city would not have been represented at all, had not the *Verein Freier Männer*, a sort of debating society to which most of the Milwaukee "Forty-eighters" and their sympathizers belonged, taken the matter in hand, and at two of its meetings hotly debated the question of sending delegates. The Democrats in the society, under the leadership of Schoeffler and Fratny, resorted to every possible means of obstruction and prevented the taking a vote on the measure. Then the Republicans tried to call a mass meeting of German citizens for the evening of July 12, the day before the convention. But the German daily papers, all of which were Democratic, refused to publish the notice, and as a consequence only four persons attended the meeting.¹ Thereupon the above-mentioned Republican leaders went to Madison on their own responsibility, and were duly recognized as delegates from Milwaukee. The convention did not fail to realize the importance of agitation among the Germans. Wunderly was made a member of the first Republican state central committee, and a committee was appointed to raise funds for the establishment of a German Republican paper at Milwaukee.²

About the time of this convention, Bernhard Domschke made his appearance in Milwaukee, and soon became one of the most important leaders of the German Republicans. He came from Louisville, Ky., where he had been associated with Karl Heinen in the publication of a newspaper. He made his début in an address on August 6, 1854, on the "Democratic Church." This created so much excitement that Fratny, the leader of the non-Catholic wing of the German Democrats, challenged him to a public debate, which took place three days later in Market Hall, crowded to its utmost capacity.³ As usual in such cases, the friends of both speakers claimed the victory for their cham-

literary and scientific journal in this country, first as a weekly and later as a monthly. Its name was *Atlantis*; first published at Detroit, it then was printed at Milwaukee, and finally at Buffalo. It was issued for about five years.

¹ *Atlantis*, i, p. 263.

² The committee consisted of Charles E. Wunderly, A. H. Bielfeld, J. R. Brigham, Edwin Palmer, and Asahel Finch, jr.

³ Koss, *Milwaukee*, p. 449.

pion; but the undoubted result was, that attention was attracted to the man from Kentucky. On October 7, 1854, appeared the *Korsar*, the first German Republican paper in Milwaukee. Its editor was Domschke, while the financial backer was Rufus King, of the *Sentinel*. So the new party had almost from the start three German weekly papers at its command; for besides the *Korsar* and Roeser's *Wisconsin Demokrat* at Manitowoc, the *Pionier* at Sauk City espoused the Republican cause.

This was the time when the Knownothing movement and its off-shoot, the American party, had obtained considerable power in several states, and the foreign-born citizens everywhere had become frightened at their success in a much greater degree than the real strength of the agitation warranted. It does not appear that the American party ever had an appreciable influence in Wisconsin.¹ How strong the Knownothing order ever became, it is impossible to learn from the material at hand. But however that may be, the Germans all over the United States felt grave apprehensions. On many sides it was proposed that the foreign-born citizens should unite into a distinct party for the purpose of protecting themselves against attacks upon their rights. At Milwaukee, the German debating club at one time had for its subject the question: "Is it conducive to progress, if the liberal Germans in the United States form a political party of their own?"² Against this idea, Domschke set himself from the beginning. In this connection an article from his pen, which appeared in the *Wisconsin Demokrat* on August 17, 1854, is interesting as showing his position, which was undoubtedly typical of that of other "Forty-eighters." He says, among other things: "The idea of forming a union of foreigners against nativism is wholly wrong, and destroys the possibility of any influence on our part; it would drive us into a union with Irishmen, those American Croats. In our struggle we are not concerned with nationality, but with principles;

¹ In 1856, the number of votes cast for the "American" presidential candidate, Fillmore, was 579, against 52,843 Democratic and 66,090 Republican votes.—*Wisconsin Blue Book*.

² Koss, *Milwaukee*, p. 440.

we are for liberty, and against union with Irishmen who stand nearer barbarism and brutality than civilization and humanity. The Irish are our natural enemies, not because they are Irishmen, but because they are the truest guards of Popery.”

It is not a part of the subject matter of this paper to relate in detail the political history of the state during the following six years. Suffice it to recall, that the Republican party from the first showed great strength, and within two years had its representative in the gubernatorial chair. In 1856, the state cast her electoral votes for Fremont, and four years later went for Lincoln. During all this time Republicanism steadily gained ground among the Germans, but at no time was there anything like a general falling away from the Democratic standards. Temperance and Knownothingism were the great bugbears that kept them largely from joining the party to which their anti-slavery sentiments would have drawn them. To this was added the fact that in the eyes of the Catholic Germans the Republicans were identical with their old and bitter enemies, the “Forty-eighters.”¹ As time progressed, and the Democrats began to feel the stings of defeat, the tone of discussion in the newspapers and on the stump became exceedingly bitter. The anti-slavery party was never mentioned except as the “Black Republican” party, and “nigger worshippers” became one of the mildest epithets. Here are some selections from an article in the *Seebote* published November 6, 1858:

You know yourselves of what elements the so-called Republican party is composed. Temperance men, abolitionists, haters of foreigners, sacrilegious despoilers of churches (*Kirchenschaender*), Catholic-killers, these are the infernal ingredients of which this loathsome Republican monstrosity is composed. * * * This miserable Republican party is a blood-thirsty tiger ever panting for your gore, that would like to kill you with the most exquisite tortures. * * * Even Germans are miserable and nefarious enough to fight in the ranks of the enemy for the destruction of their countrymen.

An ever-recurring charge against the German Republican leaders was, that they were actuated by selfish motives because the

¹ See Parkman Club *Papers*, 1896, p. 236.

Republicans stood ready to give them lucrative offices or assist them in journalistic enterprises.¹

The antagonism between the "grays" and the "greens," that is between the older German residents and those who had come since 1848, did not fill so conspicuous a place in the contemporaneous life of Wisconsin as it did in the older states, simply because there were comparatively few "grays" here. But occasionally it cropped out, as for instance in the newspaper feuds of Domschke with Frathy and Schoeffler. The political quarrels were unhesitatingly carried into social and business life. In 1857, Henry Cordier, a young German lawyer at Oshkosh, had said, in a letter to the Wisconsin *Demokrat*: "As a German Republican in Oshkosh, this stronghold of Hunkers, I stand very much isolated." Thereupon the Democratic paper in his town, which was published by another German lawyer, Charles A. Weisbrod, threatened him with boycott.² Oshkosh, the Hunker stronghold, by the way, gave 628 majority for Randall, the Republican candidate for governor.

One of the aims of which the German Republican leaders never lost sight, was to prevent their party from doing anything to justify the charge that it was in favor of Know-nothingism and prohibition. In his account of the Madison convention of 1854, Roeser, in his paper, exclaimed exultantly: "Not a word about temperance in the platform!" In 1855 he declared that in case the Republicans should nominate a temperance man for governor, the Germans would remain true to the party but stay away from the polls. On September 25, 1855, he wrote that Domschke, Wunderly, and himself had been assured by the party authorities that for the next two years the temperance question would not be taken up, as slavery was the all-important

¹ One of the charges against the Republicans, used in successive campaigns was, that they spent state money for campaign purposes by having state documents unnecessarily printed in German and giving the contracts to German Republican printing offices. The charge was well-founded, only the Democrats were equally guilty. In 1853 they had spent \$12,000 for such German printing "jobs."

² Oshkosh *Deutsche Zeitung*, Oct. 3, 1857. Cordier later became state prison commissioner, 1864-70.

issue. In their platforms of 1857, both parties declared with great emphasis against nativism. The Democrats said in their platform:

Resolved, That we hold in detestation the intolerant and un-American spirit which aims to curtail the privileges of those who, coming from other lands, seek to be citizens of the United States, and that the Democratic party of this state will, as it has ever done, frown indignantly on every attempt to interfere with the existing laws relative to nationalization.

The Republican platform contained the following plank:

Resolved. That the true advocates of free labor must necessarily be true friends to free and unobstructed immigration; that the rights of citizenship and the full enjoyment and exercise thereof make true American patriots out of foreigners; that an abridgement of those rights would necessarily tend to divide the citizens of the Republic into different classes, a ruling and a governed class; that inequality of rights among the inhabitants of a republic will always be inconsistent with and dangerous to true Democratic institutions; and that therefore the naturalization question is, with the Republicans of Wisconsin not a question of mere policy but principle.

Resolved. That we are utterly hostile to the proscription of any man on account of birthplace, religion, or color, and that we are opposed to all secret or public organizations which favor such proscription.

Under these circumstances, it was not possible for the Democrats to say that the Republicans as a party were in favor of prohibition or the restriction of the rights of foreigners. But they never failed to point out such tendencies, whenever they showed themselves in individual Republicans either at home or in other states. For instance, much was made of the fact that in 1858 John Sherman, of Ohio, had in the house of representatives opposed the admission of Minnesota to the Union, because her constitution provided that foreigners might exercise the suffrage before they had become fully naturalized.¹ Sometimes the Republicans got a chance to retaliate with this kind of argument, as when Stephen A. Douglas, that idol of the German Democrats, in 1855 opposed in the senate the provision of the land

¹ Oshkosh *Deutsche Zeitung*, May 19, 1858.

preëmption bill which gave the same rights to foreigners having declared their intention to become naturalized, as to citizens; or when in 1859, a man was appointed deputy collector of customs at Port Washington, who was generally supposed to have belonged to a Knownothing lodge and never denied the story. This mistake of the Buchanan administration excited the violent disgust of the Democratic state senator of the district, Silverman, and caused no slight chuckle among the Republicans.¹ In 1859, the strongly Republican state of Massachusetts passed a law taking away the suffrage from foreign-born citizens until the expiration of two years after the date of their naturalization. This law created the most intense indignation among foreigners throughout the United States, and undoubtedly cost the Republicans everywhere thousands of votes. The Republican state convention of the same year, in Wisconsin, took pains to condemn this law of another state; but for a long time it continued to furnish ammunition to the Democrats, who said that this law proved how the Republicans "placed the German below the nigger."²

Differing as they did with the majority of their party on nearly every point except that of slavery, the German Republicans naturally never became very strong party men; but were easily induced to vote with the Democrats whenever the slavery question was not directly at issue. An article written by Christian Essellen, in his magazine *Atlantis*, illustrates this attitude. After discussing what the Germans ought to do when compelled to choose between anti-slavery and temperance, he says:

We agree perfectly with the *New York Abendzeitung* and the *Illinois Staats-Zeitung* in this, that where no other way can be found we ought to lay principal stress on the slavery question in state and congressional, but on the temperance question in municipal elections. To those who would fain draw us into the ranks of the pro-slavery party by showing us a beer mug, we will reply that we would rather submit to annoying measures than betray the grand principles of liberty.³

¹ Madison *Democrat*, February 25, 1859.

² For an impartial discussion of the Knownothing movement from the standpoint of the Germans, see Julius Froebel, *Aus Amerika*, i, p. 513.

³ *Atlantis*, i, p. 194.

The arguments of those non-Catholic Germans who remained Democrats, are well characterized in another article by Essellen:

If the curse of slavery is mentioned for which that party conducts its propaganda, if one points to Kansas and Missouri, it is replied that all that has nothing to do with the Democratic party of Wisconsin; that Wisconsin has no slavery. If one calls attention to the bad and fraudulent management of the present Democratic state administration, complains about the frittering away of the school lands or the frauds connected with the building of the Insane Hospital, if one shows up the corruption of the Democratic party of the state, either these things are denied or refuge is taken in answers like this: It is better, after all, to have at the head of the state government negligent spendthrifts who leave us our personal liberty, than virtuous Puritans that will load us down with temperance legislation. If we remind them of the connection of the Democracy with the Jesuits, we get for an answer the general horror of Knownothings, fearing whom seems to be the principal occupation of Germans even in Wisconsin.¹

At the time when the Republican party was organized, in 1854, the German vote in Wisconsin had already become so strong that both parties found it advisable to have a place on their state tickets given to a representative of that nationality. Accordingly in 1855, the Republicans nominated for state treasurer Carl Roeser, who was credited with having been chiefly instrumental in carrying Manitowoc county in 1854, theretofore strongly Democratic, for the new party. Roeser, however, was defeated by Charles Kuehn, also a German, who was nominated by the Democrats and became the successor of Edward Janssen, his countryman, as state treasurer. In 1857, Francis Huebschmann, of Milwaukee, one of the principal leaders of the "free-thinking" wing among the German Democrats, was a candidate for the nomination of governor by the Democratic convention. He was defeated by James B. Cross, and Carl Habich of Dane county became the German representative on the ticket, being nominated for state treasurer. He was at the time the deputy of Treasurer Charles Kuehn. Dr. Huebschmann and his friends did not take their defeat in good part. In his paper, the *Gradaus*, he charged the delegates to the convention with cor-

¹ *Atlantis*, iii, p. 225.

ruption.¹ This naturally brought a violent storm of indignation about his ears, but before long he had his revenge. At the Milwaukee charter election in the following spring, a large section of the Democrats joined the Republicans for the purpose of overturning the Democratic city administration, which was charged with incapacity and corruption. The fight was especially hot in Huebschmann's home ward, the second, which was almost wholly German. In this ward lived the two candidates for city treasurer: H. Schwarting, the regular Democrat, and A. von Cotzhausen, the reform candidate, who had the endorsement of the Republicans. Huebschmann was one of the most active of the reformers. Of course he was charged with being actuated merely by a desire for revenge upon the Democrats who had preferred Cross to himself as governor. The fight attracted the attention of the entire state. The outcome was, that the reformers elected a Republican, William A. Prentiss, for mayor, who became thereby the first Republican city officer in Milwaukee. Cotzhausen, however, the reform candidate for city treasurer, was defeated.

By this time the German Republicans had found for themselves a leader beside whose eminent ability even such gifted men as Roeser, Wunderly, and Domschke appeared insignificant. This leader was Carl Schurz. When Schurz came to Wisconsin in the spring of 1853, and settled in Watertown, he was not more than twenty-four years old; but already known to every German in the United States as the youth who three years before had helped Gottfried Kinkel, the poet and revolutionist, to escape from the prison at Spandau, where he had been incarcerated for high treason.² Schurz took an active interest in the political affairs of his new home from the very start, but not until the Fremont presidential campaign did he attract general attention. It is stated, on the authority of C. C. Kunz, of Sauk City,³ that the first to bring Schurz forward as a stump orator was L. P. Harvey, who later became governor. At a meeting of the state central committee in the summer of 1856, he spoke

¹ Oshkosh *Deutsche Zeitung*, Oct. 17, 1857.

² Parkman Club *Papers*, 1896, p. 235.

³ *Seebote*, March 27, 1897.

of him as a bright young German he had met at Watertown, who was building a house for himself, but was ready to go on the stump for Fremont as soon as the house was finished. Harvey, it seems, was ignorant of the Kinkel affair. But a few days later the *Madison State Journal* published an article, presumably from the pen of Horace Rublee, in which the story of Schurz's bravery was told. This of course threw a sort of romantic glamor around the young orator, and made people curious to hear him.

In 1857, the Republicans nominated Carl Schurz for the office of lieutenant-governor. The Republican candidate for governor, Alexander W. Randall, was elected by 454 majority out of a total vote of 88,932; but Schurz was defeated by the Democratic candidate, E. D. Campbell, by 107 votes. As it was probable that many German Democrats had scratched their tickets in favor of Schurz, it seemed evident that a considerable number of native Republicans had refused to vote for the German candidate. The Democrats did not fail to take advantage of this circumstance. "There you see the character of the Black Republicans," they would argue. "They are willing enough to put a German on their ticket so as to catch German votes. But when it comes to the election, they take good care that the d——d Dutchman is not elected."

From this time on, the German portion of the Republican party became decidedly unfriendly to the state administration, and especially to its head, Governor Randall. This internal quarrel contributed not a little towards keeping the Germans away from the new party. In the summer of 1858 the German leaders published a long manifesto, which amounted to an open declaration of war against the administration. It was signed by Bernhard Domschke, Henry Cordier, H. Lindemann, Winter and Ritsche, publishers of the *Volksblatt*, Carl Roeser, and Carl Schurz. Among other things the manifesto contains the following passages:

The Republican party of this state has been unfortunate in that the former head of the administration has not succeeded in disproving the charge of corrupt acts, although he was elected principally on the issue of political honesty. It is true that the present administration

stands clear of such accusations; but we have cause to complain of many acts which must injure the harmony and prosperity of the Republican party. Corrupt opponents of Republicanism, and even unworthy individuals, have been favored and encouraged while men of merit have been disregarded and shoved aside. Such actions, with the surrounding circumstances, must destroy the confidence of the Republican masses in their leaders and representatives, discourage honest endeavors, and weaken the effectiveness of the party organization. The Democrats may do such things without astonishing the world or doing injury to themselves; but an administration which has solemnly bound itself to lend no ear to the influence of cliques and to proceed honestly, openly, and with decision, cannot break such promises without injuring the credit and organization of the party to which it owes its installation in office. An attempt to manage a new party, like the Republican, on the plan of that organization whose only aim is the distribution of public plunder, must have a tendency to gain temporary advantages at the cost of principle, to make concessions in order to win outward power, to unite for the purpose of expediency the most incompatible opposites, and to make principle the humble slave of circumstances. When a party gives way to such influences, it may suddenly find itself sinking from the solid ground of principle to the changeable platform of time-serving inconstancy.

In closing, the document reiterates the adherence of the signers to Republican principles, and expresses a hope for the future total abolition of slavery.

Schurz, in the meantime, was rapidly becoming a man of more than local reputation. In 1858, he took a somewhat conspicuous part in the great Lincoln-Douglas campaign in Illinois; and in April, 1859, he was called to Boston, to help the Republican cause in the very birthplace of anti-slavery sentiment. While he was thus busy in spreading Republican doctrines, he was violently attacked at home. The most outrageous of the assaults of his enemies was a statement made in the *Beaver Dam Democrat* to the effect that Schurz was in the pay of the Prussian government, which kept him here as a spy on his fellow exiles from Germany. The only evidence offered in support of this charge, was that his property had not been confiscated as had that of many other refugees. The affair naturally created a great deal of discussion. Huntington, the editor of the paper which had published the libel, refused to tell who had given him

the information, and the friends of Schurz guessed in vain who the author was. At one time suspicion fastened itself on Leonard Mertz, who, however, in an indignant communication to the Watertown *Transcript*, cleared himself of the accusation. Finally the *Volksfreund* claimed to have discovered the slanderer in Emil Roethe, publisher of the Watertown *Weltbuerger*, who had formerly been a protégé of Schurz's and had even lived for a while in his house. Roethe denied the charge in general terms, but many continued to believe it true.¹

When the time approached for the state convention of 1859, the anti-administration wing of the Republicans decided that Schurz must be nominated for governor. Carl Roeser became the manager of his campaign. "We arc," he said in his paper, "from principle in favor of the nomination of Carl Schurz as candidate for governor, not because he is a German, but because we demand of the Republican party that by an open, living deed, namely the nomination of a foreign-born citizen who has secured esteem throughout the United States, it disprove the charges of Know-nothingism made against it." The fight between the Schurz forces and the followers of Governor Randall, who sought a renomination, became quite bitter; and Randall, in his hatred of Schurz, finally declared that he was willing to withdraw from the contest if thereby he could defeat the nomination of his opponent. When the convention met, however, it was found that out of 174 votes cast only 48 were for Schurz. It is stated that 20 of these came from delegates of German birth. Schurz was tendered the nomination for lieutenant governor, but he declined. The defeated candidate, whose home by this time had been transferred from Watertown to Milwaukee, was on his return given a public reception by the Young Men's Republican club; and in a speech on Market square reaffirmed his loyalty to Republican principles and promised to work for the election of Randall. Some of his German followers, however, did not accept his defeat so philosophically. The German Republican club of Manitowoc adopted violent resolutions in which Governor Randall was denounced as a Know-nothing, a friend of corruptionists, and an advocate of the fugitive slave law. Through-

¹ *Atlas*, Dec. 28, 1858; Feb. 28, 1859.

out the state, large numbers of German Republicans stayed away from the polls on account of this disaffection.

The charge against Randall of upholding the fugitive slave law, brings us back to the consideration of the difference in principles, within the Republican party, of those with Democratic antecedents, like Schurz and his Germans, and those who came from the old Whig party. Undoubtedly there was no real truth in the charge. But very likely the governor had expressed himself to the effect that after the supreme court of the United States had overruled the decisions of the state supreme court and declared the fugitive slave law constitutional, no further resistance to that law could be permitted until it had been properly repealed. Schurz, however, and his Germans entertained, in this instance at least, the most extreme states' rights doctrine, as appears from his speech for Byron Paine. Although he nowhere expressly mentioned the right of nullification, his theories undoubtedly lead directly to that teaching. These views were shared by many of the old Free-soilers, who either were Democrats in everything but the slavery question, or who, like the old Liberty party men, forgot everything else in their zeal for the abolition of slavery.

Naturally, the form of Republicanism which appears in the Byron Paine speech of Carl Schurz did not remain unchallenged. It was especially Timothy O. Howe, later United States senator, who took up the sword to defend the centralistic nature of Republican principles. After considerable discussion in the newspapers, and in correspondence with prominent Republicans, he made the matter one of the principal grounds of objection to Schurz's nomination for governor. He recurred to the matter in the state convention of 1860, when Schurz was anxious to be a delegate to the Chicago national convention. Howe asked him point blank whether he considered the peculiar views expressed by him in the Milwaukee speech with regard to the jurisdiction of the state and federal courts, essential to the principles of the Republican party. Schurz, after some discussion, finally admitted that his views on that question were not essential to Republicanism, and with this answer Howe was satisfied. Schurz was duly elected a delegate, as the party

leaders were anxious to heal the breach between the two factions. Undoubtedly the same desire towards conciliation had contributed toward the election of Schurz as regent of the state university by the legislature, at the session of 1859. This election had become necessary by the resignation of Professor Carr. The office of regent at that time seems to have been considered a political plum, for it appears that the successful candidate was elected by a strict party vote over Leonard Mertz, for whom the Democrats cast their ballots.¹

The action of Schurz in retreating from his extreme position on the states' rights question, did not at all please his abolitionist friends. Associate-Justice A. D. Smith also, whose term was then about to expire, made a violent attack on him. The German Republicans and the various shades of abolitionists had from the first been closely connected, because both were more radical in their anti-slavery views than was congenial to the more conservative majority of their party.² A number of prominent Germans, including some who afterwards remained stout adherents of Democracy, had been members of the vigilance committee during the excitement connected with the rescue of the fugitive slave Glover.³ Later, Wunderly was one of Sherman Booth's sureties during the criminal prosecution against him. When Schurz became the Republican candidate for lieutenant-governor in 1857, it was Booth who nominated him in the convention. When John Brown was executed on December 2, 1859, the Milwaukee Germans, in addition to the general meeting of citizens at the chamber of commerce, held an indignation meeting of their own, and the resolutions passed

¹ *Legislative Journal*, Feb. 2, 1859.

² At one of the anti-fugitive slave law meetings in 1854, resolutions were passed that advocated nullification in its crudest form. At this meeting a state league was formed, with the following officers: E. B. Wolcott, president; A. H. Bielfeld, secretary; C. E. Wunderly, treasurer; Ira C. Paine, vice-president. See Vroman Mason, "Fugitive Slave Law in Wisconsin," *Wis. Hist. Soc. Proc.*, 1895, p. 128.

³ These members were Wunderly, Christian Essellen, F. Neukirch, F. Fratny, and Moritz Schoeffler. A. H. Bielfeld, the Free-soiler, acted as secretary of the mass meeting on March 11, 1854.

upon that occasion contained the following paragraph which ought to have satisfied the most impetuous abolitionist:

Resolved, That if the last means to solve the slavery question in a peaceful manner fails, it would in our opinion be perfectly justifiable to gain that end in revolutionary ways; and that all responsibility for such a necessary step will rest on the heads of those who persistently refuse to abolish, by means of reform, an institution that disgraces our century and this republic.

It must not be imagined, of course, that the slavery question was during all these years the only political matter which interested the people of the state or the German element among them. The antagonism between the Catholics and the free-thinkers, which was so noticeable during the preceding period, continued with unabated vigor. In 1854, the anti-Catholic paper *Flugblätter*¹ was the subject of some heated debates in both houses of the legislature, where Assemblyman Worthington of Waukesha and Senator McGarry of Milwaukee offered resolutions prohibiting the legislative postmasters from distributing this publication to the members. These resolutions, however, were not adopted. The religious radicalism of the "Forty-eighters"² found vent in their support of a movement for the abolition of the exemption of church property from taxation. In 1855, Assemblyman James Bennett, of Manitowoc, put himself at the head of this movement, and presented numerous petitions in its behalf, very largely signed by Germans. The same gentleman also offered a motion to strike out the customary ap-

¹ Parkman Club *Papers*. 1896, p. 236.

² Besides the Catholics and the freethinkers or "Forty-eighters," the Lutheran element of the German population hardly appears as a distinct factor, as far as the political affairs of this period are concerned. Many Lutherans, probably, were retained in the Democratic party through the influence of Dr. Walther, of St. Louis, the German-Lutheran patriarch of this country. He approved of slavery on the ground that it had biblical authority. Walther's influence was particularly strong in the congregations belonging to the Missouri synod, so-called. But in the younger organization, known as the Wisconsin synod, there was from the first a pronounced anti-slavery spirit which led most Lutherans belonging to it into the Republican ranks.

propriation for the services of a chaplain of the assembly, which was promptly voted down, but earned for its author the warm praise of his townsman, Carl Roeser. Mr. Bennett's political career, by the way, seems to have come to an abrupt close, for his name does not reappear in the lists of members of the legislature.

The school question was widely debated during that period and here is what one leading "Forty-eighter," Christian Essellen, has to say on the subject: "It seems to me it is a wrong conception of religious tolerance, and an extension of it beyond its natural limits, if religious associations are permitted to snatch from the state a part of public instruction and use it for their selfish, one-sided ecclesiastical purposes." He went on to advocate the prohibition of all private and parochial schools, and as a first step in that direction the subjection of all such institutions to the supervision of the state authorities.¹ It is doubtful, however, whether Essellen here expressed the views of most of the "Forty-eighters," for just about this time they were very active in founding private schools wherever there were considerable numbers of German residents.

During this period no inconsiderable number of Germans held various state offices, including membership in the legislature. Most of the German members of the latter were on the Democratic side. Among the more prominent of them was Fred Horn of Cedarburg, who in 1854 was speaker, as he had been in 1851, and was to be again in 1875. Another Democrat of considerable prominence in the legislature was Charles G. Rodolph, who represented Iowa county in 1851, Richland in 1858, and was in the senate during the sessions of 1859 and 1860. He gained some notoriety by a speech on the Kansas troubles, February 28, 1858. During that session a considerable portion of the legislative time was spent in discussions of the national political situation. On March 1, Paul Weil, of West Bend, another German Democratic member, offered a resolution "that all buncombe speeches on Kansas be limited to five minutes." But the resolution was promptly tabled, and the flow of oratory went on as before. On the whole the influence of the Germans

¹ *Atlantis*, i, p. 24.

in the legislature does not seem to have been very great. In 1859, Bernhard Domschke passed a pretty severe judgment on them. But his opinion may have been influenced by the fact that in the legislature of that year the German members were all Democrats. He referred to the fact that several German papers had mentioned with satisfaction that no less than fourteen members of the legislature were Germans. To this he replied, that mere numbers would never gain the admiration of others for the Germans, if they lacked ability. Of all the Germans there was but one of respectable capacity—Horn. The rest were mere ciphers. Then he went on: "The others are mostly dumb as codfish, play second or third fiddles, stay at home half of the week rather than attend, and on occasion disgrace the German name by foolish speeches as did Senator Rodolph the other day."¹

On the whole, the picture which the Germans in Wisconsin present during the period from 1854 to 1860, is a satisfactory one from the standpoint of a member of that element who desires to see his nationality exert an influence proportionate to their numbers and capacity, and from the point of view of an American who wishes that so important an element in our commonwealth shall become an organic part, instead of remaining a foreign body within the community.

The German immigration into Wisconsin, before the war, reached its high water mark in 1854, when according to the estimate given by Fred Horn who was then commissioner of immigration, 16,000 Germans settled in the state. Among the immigrants during this and the preceding three or four years, there was an extraordinary number of educated and able men who had been compelled to leave their country for political reasons. At first most of these imagined that their exile would be of short duration; and consequently, during the first few years, took far more interest in the affairs of Europe than in those of the United States.² Others wasted their strength for a while dreaming

¹ *Atlas* March 1, 1859.

² They were described by Christian Essellen as "men who begin every sentence with 'When the outbreak comes again' (*Wenn's wieder losgeht*)."

about the foundation of a German state in the Northwest. But by 1854, the hopes for a renewal of the revolutionary movements in Germany were pretty well dissipated; and more and more the leading minds among the Germans began to feel that their home was here, and to devote their energies to promoting the welfare of their adopted country. By the year 1860 they had become excellent American citizens; and when in the following year the War of Secession broke out, no element of our population was more prompt or more enthusiastic than the Germans in rallying round the union banner. True, as the war progressed and its hardships became more severely felt, a few Germans, misled by demagogical copperheads, took part in the disgraceful draft riots. But it was a German governor who put down these disturbances with an energy that put to shame the native governors of New York and some other states in similar emergencies. The administration of Governor Salomon, however, lies beyond the scope of this paper.

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