

Election fixing in Philly?

Yes, by city Republicans

By William C. Kashatus

Donald Trump and his supporters have charged Philadelphia Democrats with planning a massive conspiracy to “steal this election” for Hillary Clinton.

“We have to make sure the people of Philadelphia are protected, that the vote counts are 100 percent,” Trump declared recently in Wilkes-Barre. “Everybody wants that, but I hear these horror shows, [about voter fraud] and we have to make sure that this election is not stolen from us.”

Trump’s ally, former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani, predicted that people would be bused to Philadelphia to vote “four or five times” in place of dead voters on the rolls.

There is a historical precedent for election fixing in the City of Brotherly Love, but the Republicans — not the Democrats — are responsible for it.

Between 1867 and 1933, when New Dealers revitalized the city’s Democratic Party, a corrupt Republican machine controlled Philadelphia politics. Of all the bosses during that period, U.S. Sen. Matthew S. Quay perfected the art of election fixing and used his position on key Senate committees to reward loyalty to the machine.

Quay, the son of a poor Presbyterian minister, allied himself with state Republican boss Simon Cameron, and served as secretary of the commonwealth in 1873 and again in 1879.

In 1885, Quay was elected state treasurer, and two years later the state legislature elected him to the U.S. Senate. Shortly after, Cameron partitioned the state into three districts. While he and his son, Donald, ran central Pennsylvania, state Treasurer Robert Mackey controlled Pittsburgh, and Quay was made



Matthew Quay, painting by William A. Greaves, 1896. Library of Congress

Philadelphia’s party boss.

Quay’s genius for election fixing and voter fraud was unparalleled among big-city bosses of the day. He allied his Republican machine with Philadelphia’s saloons, gambling dens, and other commercial vice operations, which helped bring out the vote and paid protection money that helped fund the party’s bribes and services.

Even the Democratic Party was on the take. Quay’s machine paid the rent on the Democrats’ headquarters and guaranteed them a percentage of offices to make it appear as if a genuine two-party system functioned.

Quay’s most egregious case of voter fraud came in the mayoral election of 1903 between Republican John Weaver and Democrat Francis Fisher Kane. By that time, Quay was the commonwealth’s sole GOP boss, controlling Philadelphia through a lieutenant, David H. Lane.

“Repeaters” — those hired by Lane to vote repeatedly — went from one polling place to another, voting on slips. On their return

rounds they changed coats and hats to avoid being recognized. Some voters learned that they had already voted when they arrived at the polls. Others were able to vote multiple times because their names had never been removed from the voting rolls in the previous wards where they once lived. Still others stuffed ballot boxes with names of the deceased and, in one ward, the names of their pet animals.

To ensure the fix, city police beat citizens or elections officers who tried to do their duty — and then charged them with inciting a riot.

When all the votes were counted, Quay’s machine rolled up a majority of about 130,000 for Weaver, with a fraudulent vote estimated somewhere between 40,000 and 80,000. Kane received just 32,000 votes.

“Deprived of self-government, Philadelphians take their orders from the state boss, Matthew S. Quay, who is the proprietor of Pennsylvania and the real ruler of Philadelphia, just as William Penn, the Great Proprietor, was,” wrote muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens in the July 1903 issue of McClure’s Magazine. “Other American cities, no matter how bad their own condition may be, all point with scorn to Philadelphia as the worst-governed city in the country. But I believe that Philadelphia is simply the most corrupt and the most contented to remain that way.”

Steffens was correct. After Quay’s death in 1904, he was succeeded by a protégé, Boies Penrose. Like Quay, Penrose was elected and re-elected to the U.S. Senate and controlled the state and city political machinery by dispensing contracts, patronage, and campaign funds, as well as by election fixing until his death in 1922.

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