

2000

Two Decades of Political Conflict - 1900-1920: Tampa's Politics in a League of It's Own

Robert Kerstein

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune>

Recommended Citation

Kerstein, Robert (2000) "Two Decades of Political Conflict - 1900-1920: Tampa's Politics in a League of It's Own," *Sunland Tribune*: Vol. 26 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/sunlandtribune/vol26/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunland Tribune by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

TWO DECADES OF POLITICAL CONFLICT -1900-1920: Tampa's Politics in a League of Its Own

Robert Kerstein

During the first two decades of the Twentieth Century, Tampa's business and professional community was politically active and influential, and the Board of Trade, which Tampa's business community organized in 1885 to promote growth, was a key organization. Even before the turn of the century, however, political conflict had surfaced within the city's civic-commercial elite and competing political organizations sought office, sometimes forming coalitions with labor supporters. Members of the civic-commercial elite cooperated in organizing the White Municipal Party prior to the 1910 local elections, which effectively disenfranchised African-Americans from the most important local elections.

Beginning in 1910, a political organization headed by D.B. McKay prevailed in local elections. This organization was often opposed by competing interests, including the Socialist Party, but McKay adequately incorporated segments of the civic-commercial elite, labor, and the Latin community in structuring a governing coalition.

Political Factions: 1900-1908

In 1900, Peter O. Knight, the politically influential attorney who was then serving as the state attorney for Hillsborough County, and who was associated with the Tampa Electric Company and several other major corporations, was on the losing side of the political contest with the Citizens' League, an organization that had formed prior to the 1898 election. The Citizens' League was successful in 1900 in gaining control of

Tampa's government. The League first defeated Knight and his allies in contests for the Hillsborough County Democratic Executive Committee, and then built support for a slate in the municipal elections that was generally unopposed.¹

The Citizens' League included among its leadership non-Latin working class citizens, as well as members of the commercial-civic elite. Its platform called for significant changes in public policy, advocating city ownership of the waterworks and lighting plants.² The platform also supported free school facilities in each ward, opposed the "giving away of franchises" by the city and emphasized the need for fair elections and the honest counting of ballots, a reaction to charges of vote fraud in the 1898 elections.³

The League's reformist bent was further indicated by its invitations both to Mayor Samuel "Golden Rule" Jones, the social reform mayor of Toledo, and Socialist leader Eugene V. Debs, to speak in Tampa.⁴ Debs visited Tampa in February as a guest of the Citizens' League and of several labor unions. He was escorted around the city by William Frecker, an incumbent City Council member and a Citizens' League candidate for reelection to the Council.⁵

The *Tampa Morning Tribune* was the primary vehicle in which those opposed to the Citizens' League, including *Tribune* publisher Wallace F. Stovall and Knight, expressed their views.⁶ The *Tribune* characterized League activists as consisting of corporate lawyers, Republicans, independents, and sorehead Democrats. Knight publicly contended, when it still appeared that the candidates of the Citizens'

League would face opposition in the municipal election, that the efforts by the League to appeal to the working class of the community were a facade. In reality, he argued, the election was primarily a battle over which set of corporate interests would control the city.⁷

It is true that competing members of the commercial-civic elite were on different sides of the contest involving the Citizens' League. Still, the Citizens' League's president, secretary, and treasurer were all carpenters, rather than being representatives of major corporate interests.⁸ Moreover, representatives of the Citizens' League, including Francis L. Wing, its mayoral candidate, unsuccessfully argued for the elimination of poll tax requirement for voting in the primary elections for county officers, indicating a desire to expand the franchise to lower-income citizens.⁹

Knight by no means accepted the election results of 1900 as the end of the battle; rather, the election was only the beginning. In his efforts to influence the new government on behalf of his corporate clients, Knight claimed to have had a fair degree of success. In August, Knight claimed that he was now "in line" with the City Council about as much as he had been under Mayor Frank C. Bowyer administration."¹⁰

In reality, the Citizens' League government did not entirely defer to Knight or to the prevailing powers on the Board of Trade. For example, in January 1901 the City Council asked the city attorney to take action against Tampa Electric because it had violated city ordinances.¹¹ The Council even voted to award a franchise to John P. Martin and Associates, a competitor with Tampa Electric, to build a trolley system, as well as an electric power plant.¹² In addition, the

Citizens' League government supported a series of changes to Tampa's 1899 city charter, a charter that had primarily been the work of Mayor Bowyer, city attorney C.C. Whitaker, and Knight. These changes included the elimination of the Commission of Public Works, whose members gained office in elections where only freeholders could vote. Knight later contended that if the legislature had adopted the charter amendments, Tampa Electric would have been "swamped . . . by the payment of taxes and fees to this city."¹³ The charter amendments were successfully opposed by the Board of Trade in its lobbying before the state legislature.¹⁴ Still, in September 1901, Knight expressed his strong displeasure with the Citizens' League government, complaining that there was a "secret organization composed of anarchists, who are running this city and county government . . ."¹⁵

In 1902, the Good Government League, a new political organization, mobilized support for its candidates against the Citizens' League. Their respective mayoral candidates represented different backgrounds and occupations. The Good Government League backed James McKay, Jr., a descendent of a prominent pioneer family, a founding member of the Board of Trade, and a two-term member of the Florida Senate during the 1880s.¹⁶ McKay defeated the Citizens' League candidate, Charles A. Wimsett, a leader of the Florida State Federation of Labor.¹⁷ Only one candidate of the Citizens' League was successful in winning a seat on the City Council and none were elected to the Commission of Public Works.¹⁸ In fact, no incumbent City Council members or members of the Commission of Public Works continued in office after the 1902 elections.

| TABLE 1. MAYORAL ELECTIONS 1898-1908 | | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| | | Mayoral Candidates | ORGANIZATION | PERCENT OF VOTE |
| YEAR | 1898 | F. BOWYER | | 49.6% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 822 | W.J. DOMBROWSKY | Citizens' League | 25.9% |
| | | F. SALOMONSON | | 24.5% |
| YEAR | 1900 | F. WING | Citizens' League | |
| VOTER TURNOUT | | UNOPPOSED | | |
| YEAR | 1902 | J. MCKAY, JR. | Good Govt. League | 60.9% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 1,905 | C.A. WIMSETT | Citizens' League | 39.1% |
| YEAR | 1904 | F.A. SALOMONSON | | 47.3% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 2,214 | W.H. FRECKER | Citizens' League | 34.2% |
| | | W.G. MASON | Voters' Union | 17.3% |
| | | S. ELLIOTT | Socialist | 1.2% |
| YEAR | 1906 | W. H. FRECKER | Mun. Own. Assn. | 39.8% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 2,576 | A.W. CUSCADEN | | 32.7% |
| | | F.C. BOWYER | | 27.5% |
| YEAR | 1908 | F. WING | | 51.1% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 4,041 | W.H. FRECKER | | 47.9% |
| | | D. HANKINS | Socialist | 1.0% |
| Sources: TMT, 8 June 1898; 4 June 1902; 8 June 1904; 6 June 1906; 3 June 1908 | | | | |

| TABLE 2. WHITE MUNICIPAL PRIMARY ELECTIONS 1910-1916 AND GENERAL ELECTIONS 1912 AND 1916 | | | | | |
|--|-------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|
| | | ELECTION | Mayoral Candidates | PARTY | PERCENT OF VOTE |
| YEAR | 1910 | PRIMARY | D.B. MCKAY | | 42.1% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 3,426 | | W.H. FRECKER | | 37.5% |
| | | | J.N. HOLMES | | 20.4% |
| YEAR | 1910 | RUNOFF | D.B. MCKAY | | 51.9% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 3,592 | | W.H. FRECKER | | 48.1% |
| YEAR | 1912 | PRIMARY | D.B. MCKAY | | 55.3% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 3,216 | | W.H. FRECKER | | 31.9% |
| | | | H.P. BAYA | | 12.8% |
| YEAR | 1916 | PRIMARY | D.B. MCKAY | | 56.6% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 4,034 | | F. BOWYER | | 43.4% |
| YEAR | 1912 | GENERAL | D.B. MCKAY | WHITE. MUN PTY. | 70.2% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 3,039 | | D.L. ROBINSON | SOCIALIST | 29.8% |
| YEAR | 1916 | GENERAL | D.B. MCKAY | WHITE MUN. PTY. | 82.6% |
| VOTER TURNOUT | 2,980 | | K.L. HARTE | SOCIALIST | 17.4% |
| Sources: TMT, 7 April 1910; 17 April 1910; 9 April 1912; 4 June 1912; 18 April 1916; 6 June 1916 | | | | | |

Labor leaders were not united in backing Wimsett. Frank Bell, who had been president of the Central Trades and Labor Assembly, comprised largely of AFL-affiliated unions, publicly supported McKay and the Good Government League. Bell had headed the labor assembly during the conflict in the cigar industry in 1900 and 1901 between *La Resistencia*, the radical, immigrant-led union, and the AFL-affiliated Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU).¹⁹ More generally, however, McKay's supporters included many of Tampa's commercial-civic elite.²⁰

Others from the commercial-civic elite supported the Citizens' League.²¹ In addition, several union people were in the leadership ranks of the Citizens' League, as indicated by its nomination of Wimsett for mayor. W.A. Platt, the former secretary of the CMIU, who now clearly was at odds with Bell, was on its executive committee, and the other executive committee members were also working class.²²

The *Tribune* and other McKay supporters advanced a theme similar to many boosters of the New South during this era, criticizing efforts to array labor versus capital, and arguing that labor and capital had to "go hand in hand together."²³ The *Tribune* emphasized that a victory for the Good Government League would invite capital to the community and would encourage public improvements.²⁴ After the victory of virtually the entire slate of the Good Government League, the *Tribune* emphasized that those who have money to invest will not hesitate, and that there would be no limit to the growth and development of the city.²⁵

The Good Government League did not remain as an organized group for the 1904 election, but many of its supporters rallied

behind the candidacy of former mayor Frederick Salomonson after McKay chose not to run for reelection. Salomonson shared a similar perspective with McKay, emphasizing the need for growth, and also noting the importance of providing for public investment to service growth. This position was supported by the *Tribune*, which argued in an editorial that Tampa was progressing in terms of business and housing, but that the government had done little over the years to provide infrastructure services.²⁶ Salomonson reacted explicitly against the "moral" elements, emphasizing that the cigar industry was the basis for the economic wealth of the city and that cigar workers were accustomed to the lax enforcement of liquor and gambling laws.²⁷ Thus, the strong enforcement of "morality" and economic growth were perhaps antithetical.

The "moral" issue was added to the agenda largely because of the Voters' Union, a new organization which nominated W.G. Mason for mayor, a dentist who had served on the City Council during the Citizens' League's administration. Mason advocated the strong enforcement of gambling and liquor laws, and emphasized that Salomonson was supportive of an "open" community, meaning that he would not oppose gambling, liquor, and prostitution. Some former Citizens' League activists now backed this new organization. It shared the Citizens' League position calling for the public ownership of utilities and whose leaders characterized Salomonson as being the corporation candidate backed by the *Tribune* and Peter O. Knight. The Citizens' League, however, nominated William Frecker to run for mayor. Although Frecker secured more votes in the 1904 election than Mason, Salomonson won by a considerable margin and virtually all of the City Council candidates who supported Salomonson also

were elected.²⁸ Only one incumbent Council member ran for reelection, and he was defeated. After this election there was a new mayor and a complete turnover of representatives on the Council.

Salomonson did not run for reelection in 1906; nor did the Citizens' League continue as an organization. William Frecker continued his quest for mayor and was now successful, defeating Frank Bowyer and Arthur Cuscaden, a businessman who had served on the City Council during the McKay administration.²⁹ Several of the candidates of Frecker's new organization, the Municipal Ownership Association (MOA), were elected to the City Council, in an election in which only one incumbent was reelected.

Neither of Tampa's two major newspapers supported Frecker. The *Tribune* backed Bowyer, emphasizing that those who were supporting his candidacy were the same people who built the city and would continue to allow it to prosper.³⁰ D.B. McKay and his *Times* endorsed Cuscaden, contending that he was a moderate compared to both of his opponents. According to the *Times*, Bowyer was representing corporate interests and the "extreme" elements in the city were supporting Frecker, a claim that was belied by Frecker's significant business support.³¹

Frecker was successful in building a coalition that included some former Citizens' League activists, segments of the commercial-civic elite, and some union activists.³² A labor-political league formed that pledged its support for Frecker, and J.A. Roberts, the successful MOA candidate for City Council in Ward Four, was a secretary of the cigarmakers' union. Voters also elected at least two other union members to

the Council, one from the Carpenters' Union and another from the Painters' Union.³³

This labor support was vital to Frecker's victory, because large numbers of Tampa's laborers both in and out of the cigar industry were organized. The *Tribune* contended that Tampa was "one of the strongest union strongholds in the country." Over 5,000 workers marched in the Labor Day parade in 1907, including representatives of the Women's Union Label League and the Building Trades Council, as well as members of unions representing carpenters, painters, brewers, and printers, as well as cigarmakers.³⁴

Although Peter O. Knight had endorsed Bowyer in the 1906 election, at least some of Knight's interests were well served during the Frecker administration.³⁵ Yet, Frecker and the City Council sometimes took stands and pursued policy that was critical of corporate interests. Frecker even argued early in 1907 that the private corporations that owned the lighting and water plants should "surrender" them to the city and suggested that only the manipulations of the lobbyists and legislators in Tallahassee had prevented this from happening. The Council did pass ordinances reducing the rates that were charged by the Tampa Waterworks Company and the Peninsular Phone Company, although both of these efforts were overturned in the courts. The council also unanimously condemned three businesses that were facing a strike from union members.³⁶

In the mayoral election in 1908, Frecker was narrowly defeated in his bid for reelection by Wing, who had served as mayor from 1900 through 1902, when both he and Frecker were active in the Citizens' League.³⁷ Neither the Citizens' League nor the Municipal Ownership Association

played a role in this race, and both apparently had disbanded prior to the campaign. In fact, there was little distinction between the appeals of Wing and Frecker during the campaign. Both claimed to support growth, recognized the need for more public services, and said they would befriend labor. Although several citizens who had been politically active in earlier campaigns supported a particular candidate, the *Tribune* actually took no stand, noting that each was a good candidate.³⁸

Political Factions: 1910-1918

By 1910, D.B. McKay, the owner and publisher of the *Tampa Daily Times*, the *Tribune's* primary competitor, began to participate in local politics much more actively than only through his work on the newspaper. He formed a loose-knit political organization that participated in political activity in Tampa from 1910 through 1935. McKay was first elected mayor in 1910 and remained in office until 1920. He was again elected in 1927 and served until 1931.

McKay was one of those who was active in forming the White Municipal Party before the 1910 election. Essentially, this was the Democratic Party reorganized at the local level so as to exclude the African-American population from playing a role in local electoral politics. From 1910 until well into the 1940s, the most important local election was the White Municipal Party primary, in which no African-Americans could vote.³⁹ According to some of its supporters, the "white primary" would reduce the "purchasable vote" in local elections. This was an ironic contention, given that political corruption became more ingrained in Tampa's political fabric during the decades following its adoption.

Locally, obstacles to black participation existed even before the adoption of the white primary. For example, Zachariah D. Greene, a black lawyer, tried unsuccessfully to get on the ballot for municipal judge in 1908. Although he had obtained enough signatures on a petition to appear on the ballot, he was told that his petition had been lost.⁴⁰ African-Americans, however, had registered to vote in sizable numbers prior to the formation of the white primary. In 1906, blacks comprised about 24% of the registered voters for the municipal election, a figure similar to their percentage of the total population. They constituted 33% of the registered voters in the First Ward, which included the downtown area, and 26% of the registered voters in Ward Two, north of downtown.⁴¹ The *Tribune* contended that the "Negro was the balance of power" in some municipal elections.⁴² Now, with the adoption of the white primary, a decisive step was taken to remove African-Americans from meaningful civic and political participation.

(Note: Superscript for endnote 43 omitted)⁴³

McKay's first electoral victory was in 1910 against Frecker and a third candidate. More voters cast ballots for McKay than for the other candidates in the white primary, but a runoff election was necessary due to the failure of any candidate to earn a majority of the votes.⁴⁴ In the runoff, McKay narrowly defeated Frecker.⁴⁵ In the general election, the Socialist candidate for mayor gained little support. Two Socialists also unsuccessfully ran for at-large seats for the City Council in the general election.⁴⁶

Prior to the primary, McKay gained the endorsement of several established business-professional men, although Reverend Joe Sherouse, McKay's campaign manager, was a union member.⁴⁷ Some of

Frecker's long-time supporters from Tampa's commercial-civic elite continued to back him in this race.⁴⁸ Peter O. Knight, whom Frecker had referred to as a "boa constrictor" in an earlier campaign, but whose interests were well served when Frecker was mayor, endorsed Frecker.⁴⁹ Still, Frecker emphasized during the campaign that he had strong union credentials, stressing that he had been active in the union movement in Chicago and that he had helped organize the clerk's union in Tampa.⁵⁰

McKay's campaign was designed to attract support from Tampa's working class, as well as from the commercial-civic elite. For example, he advocated the municipal ownership of public utilities, claiming that cities such as Jacksonville had profited from providing lighting to their citizens.⁵¹ McKay also argued for the municipal ownership of the docks, contending that this would ensure that one corporation would not be able to shut out another from the facilities. Plus, he generally supported expanded public improvements to support growth.⁵²

In spite of McKay's contention that he supported labor, Socialist Party activist S. Elliott challenged McKay in the general election. Elliott spoke out against the disfranchisement of blacks in the white primary, criticized "greedy real estate men," supported the referendum and recall in local elections, and called for public ownership of utilities.⁵³ He had run for treasurer in the 1908 municipal election, and earned 407 votes, compared to the 41 votes that the Socialist candidate for mayor had garnered in that election.⁵⁴ In his bid for mayor, Elliott gained fewer than three hundred votes, while McKay gained more than five times his amount.⁵⁵

The *Tribune's* coverage of the general election focused on the issue of race, and showed clearly that *Tribune* publisher Stovall and candidate McKay were allies in the quest to limit any political influence of African-Americans in Tampa. The *Tribune* had not endorsed any candidate during the primary elections, but, of course, favored McKay against Elliott, and emphasized that its primary fear was that blacks would turn out in large numbers and support the Socialist candidate. In fact, prior to the election, the *Tribune* had noted that it had "been strongly hinted that, in case the negroes do attempt to elect a man over the party nominee, there will be trouble at the polls on election day."⁵⁶ However, the paper announced in a headline after the election that the "Negro was Conspicuous by His Absence."⁵⁷

After the election, it became clear that McKay and Stovall were also allies in fighting striking workers in the cigar industry. In spite of McKay's appeal to working-class voters during the election campaign, shortly after taking office he helped organize a citizens' committee similar to one that he had been involved with in 1910. A strike and lockout in 1910 followed the demand of the Cigar Makers International Union (CMIU), the dominant union representing the workers, for a closed shop. Vigilante activity included the hanging of two Italians who had been arrested for shooting a bookkeeper in a cigar factory in West Tampa.⁵⁸ It was never proven who actually participated in the hangings, but many business leaders expressed their support.⁵⁹ Shortly afterwards, leading Board of Trade members, including West Tampa founder Hugh C. Macfarlane and Stovall, formed a citizens' committee that engaged in several acts of violence and intimidation against striking workers.⁶⁰

Mayor McKay and members of Tampa's commercial-civic elite who were on the side of McKay and Stovall during the 1910 electoral fray, now joined with many who had opposed them in the election, including Peter O. Knight, in supporting the cigar manufacturers against the CMIU. Many union members outside of the cigar industry vocally supported the cigar workers.⁶¹ Thus, competing elite factions in Tampa politics coalesced when the issue was articulated as labor versus capital in the cigar industry. McKay joined with others in Tampa's business and professional community against both Latin and non-Latin union members in the community, some of whom had been his electoral supporters. During the strike, McKay hired citizens as "special police" to aid the citizens' committee. According to one analysis, "arbitrary arrests, illegal searches, routine physical beatings, and flagrant violations of civil rights characterized the actions of the patrols."⁶² This strike lasted several months, but the demand of the CMIU for a closed shop was defeated by the factory owners, who were organized into the Tampa Cigar Manufacturers' Association.⁶³

In spite of this, McKay was successful in defeating Frecker and attorney H.P. Baya in the 1912 election. Due to a revised city charter that the state legislature adopted in May 1911, this was the first Tampa mayoral race in which the victor served a four-year term.⁶⁴ McKay gained a majority of the votes in the primary election of the White Municipal Party, thus avoiding a runoff.⁶⁵ Most of the commercial-civic elite lined up solidly behind McKay, due partly to his coalescence with his 1910 electoral opponents in favor of the cigar manufacturers and against the unions.

McKay's platform in 1912 was growth-oriented and non-threatening to business and

professional interests. He no longer stressed the goal of public ownership of utilities. Instead, McKay claimed to be running on the record of his first administration. He pointed to the recent expansion of the city, including the annexation of the territory that had been included in East Tampa, which had incorporated only a few years before, and the public acquisition of waterfront property in that area, an action that the U.S. government's Corps of Engineers had insisted on as a condition for future assistance in developing Tampa's ports.⁶⁶ In addition, McKay emphasized that Tampa had grown by annexing large areas of Tampa Heights and Hyde Park in 1911.

After McKay's primary victory, some sensed that many of Tampa's Latin and African-American populations were likely to oppose him in the general election. The *Tribune* expressed fear that if McKay's supporters failed to vote in the general election, it was possible that a Socialist could be elected mayor by mobilizing both blacks and white Socialists. The newspaper emphasized that that it could conceive "of no greater calamity that could befall this city than the election of a Socialist administration, or even a partly Socialist administration."⁶⁷ Although no Socialist candidate was elected, the general election indicated that a sizable proportion of Tampa's voters was dissatisfied with the lack of a meaningful choice in the white primary election. Almost as many people voted in the general election as in the primary, and Dan L. Robinson, the Socialist candidate for mayor, gained almost thirty percent of the votes. Elliott, the Socialist candidate in 1910, had spoken out in support of the striking cigar workers later that year, and certainly Robinson shared the same perspective.⁶⁸ He secured a majority in both Wards Four and Seven. Blacks were able to vote in this general election, and they

comprised a sizable portion of the population in Ward Four. Ward Seven in Ybor City included primarily Latin voters.⁶⁹ A majority of voters in Ward Seven also supported most of the Socialist candidates for citywide Council seats, although none was elected. Surprisingly, they did not elect the Socialist Council candidate from their ward, with the defeated candidate contending that ordering of the candidates' names on the ballot misled the voters.⁷⁰

Robinson's support came even though a revision to Tampa's city charter in 1911 imposed a poll tax as a requisite for voting in municipal elections, which was more likely to discourage working class and lower-income residents from voting than wealthier citizens.⁷¹ Also, in spite of Tampa having a sizable Latin population, many of whom opposed McKay's support of vigilante activity against Latin union activists, several factors worked against a strong anti-McKay "protest vote" by the Latin community. For one thing, the majority of Latins still had not been naturalized and thus could not legally vote.⁷² Thus, Latins in Tampa could not legally use the franchise to try to translate their concerns to political representatives. Furthermore, the radical ideologies of many Latins led them to view elections as relatively irrelevant mechanisms in achieving meaningful reform.⁷³ The mutual aid associations that had been organized by Cubans, Afro-Cubans, Spaniards, and Italians provided health care and other benefits to members that were perhaps seen as more meaningful than benefits that might have accrued from electoral accomplishments.⁷⁴ In addition, McKay often spoke out against political opponents who he claimed were attacking the Latin population. McKay did not participate in the verbal criticisms of gambling in Ybor City nor did he make any serious effort to crack down on its operation. This, in itself, was

likely to bring some support from members of the Latin working class who faced discrimination from much of the wider community.⁷⁵

These factors, as well as the lack of strikes and vigilante activity in Tampa's cigar industry during McKay's second term, probably contributed to the ebbing of the Socialist Party vote in the mayoral vote in the 1916 general election. His administration did succeed in securing a reduction in gas rates from the Tampa Gas Company and had some success in an effort to secure a reduction in electric rates, both of which were likely to bring working class support to McKay.⁷⁶ Karl L. Harter, the Socialist candidate, securing only 17.45% of the votes, after McKay was renominated in the primary of the White Municipal Party against former mayor Frank Bowyer.⁷⁷ Giovanni Vaccaro, the Socialist candidate for Council in the seventh ward, gained almost 40% of the votes, but still was defeated by the White Municipal Party candidate.⁷⁸ In fact, all of the White Municipal Party's nominees were elected.

In Conclusion

By the turn of the century, Tampa's politically active members of the civic-commercial elite sometimes competed for office. Representatives of the city's working class, although sometimes divided, began to play a more active role in political organizations vying for power. Neither a cohesive governing regime nor simply governance by a commercial-civic elite existed. Beginning in 1910, McKay led a successful political organization, although not a centralized political machine. By 1920, with McKay as mayor for 10 years, a loose-knit regime governed. Many of Tampa's commercial-civic elite were more closely tied to this regime than was any

other segment of the population. Members of the Commission of Public Works, which played a significant role in allocating tax revenue for the expansion of infrastructure, were primarily business and professional citizens and had less electoral accountability than did the City Council.⁷⁹ Similarly, members of the Board of Port Commissioners, formed in 1913, were primarily members of the professional-business class.⁸⁰

Still, McKay's administrations, as had Frecker's and the Citizens' League's earlier, adopted some policies that appealed to the working classes and union voters, and not merely the professional and business community. Further, it purchased, largely at the urging of the federal government, a significant amount of land in the port area to challenge the near-monopoly that railroad interests had acquired.

In spite of these policies, governance in Tampa during the first two decades of the twentieth century should not be thought of as representing an "inclusive" progressive regime or a pluralist polity open to any organized group wanting to influence policy. Rather, Tampa's politics were most responsive to business interests, open to some segments of a fractionalized working class, closed to women, and became even more restrictive to African-Americans after the the organization of the White Municipal Party and adoption of the white primary.

Twenty years into the 20th century, Tampa's hopes for a modern and progressive city governed by politicians responsive to the needs of all the people remained an elusive and frustrated dream of the disenfranchised, the working class, and the minorities.

ENDNOTES

Robert Kerstein has been a professor of government and world affairs at the University of Tampa since 1977. He has written several articles on urban politics and policy. His book, *Politics and Growth in Twentieth-Century Tampa*, will be published by the University Press of Florida in May 2001.

¹ Knight had been the chairman of the executive committee of the Hillsborough County Democratic Party. He was defeated by Judge Frank M. Simonton in his bid for reelection as the Democratic Party committeeman representing Hyde Park; *Weekly Tribune*, 3 May 1900. Former mayor Herman Glogowski did try, unsuccessfully, to be elected Tax Collector against the Citizens' League candidate.

² *Tampa Morning Tribune (TMT)* 20 March 1900.

³ *TMT*, 1 April 1900.

⁴ *TMT*, 7 February 1900.

⁵ *TMT*, 9 February 1900.

⁶ Col. J.B. Anderson, who represented the Third Ward in Hyde Park on the Board of Public Works, and who served with Knight on the board of Exchange National Bank, was also associated with the Knight faction. He was the financial agent of the city during the Bowyer administration; *TMT*, 30 May 1900. Others opposed to the Citizens League were William B. Henderson, a founding member of the Board of Trade, who was elected to the Board of Public Works in 1898, and Solon B. Turner, who had been president of the Tampa Electric Illum Company, and was married to Matilda Lykes, the daughter of parents from both the Lykes and the McKay families; *TMT*, 26 April 26, 1900; 24 April 1900. Also opposing the League was Frank Bruen, the president of the City Council during the Bowyer administration (1898-1900). Bruen was one of the organizers of the Tampa Gas Company, along with Eduardo Manrara, Peter O. Knight, and A.J. Boardman; Karl H. Grismer, *Tampa: A History of the City of Tampa and the Tampa Bay Region of Florida* (St. Petersburg: St. Petersburg Printing Co., 1950) 230.

⁷ *Weekly Tribune*, 26 April 1900. In May 1900, members of the Democratic Party who were affiliated with the Citizens' League separated from the League's Republicans during the county elections campaigns; *Weekly Tribune*, 17 May 1900.

⁸ *TMT*, 15 February 1900. J.R. Williams was the League's president, W.L. Hanks was its secretary, and John M. Henderson was its treasurer. Henderson was

serving as City Clerk in 1899; Sholes, *Directory of the City of Tampa 1899*.

⁹ *TMT*, 1 April 1900.

¹⁰ George Baldwin to H.H. Hunt, September 25, 1900, in which Baldwin quotes the letter from Knight to Baldwin, dated 19 August 1900, TECO Archives.

¹¹ City Council, minutes, 23 January 1901, 352.

¹² City Council, minutes, 23 August 1901, 479; 6 September 1901, 489; 24 September 1901, 497; 11 October 1901, 8. In an election on December 3, 1901, citizens voted 266-52 to approve the contract with Martin for lighting for the City of Tampa; City Council Minutes, 6 December 1901, 251.

¹³ Peter O. Knight to George J. Baldwin, 4 September 1901; Baldwin Papers, University of North Carolina, Box 54.

¹⁴ *TMT*, 29 May 1906.

¹⁵ Peter O. Knight to George J. Baldwin, 4 September 1901; Baldwin Papers, University of North Carolina, Box 54.

¹⁶ Grismer, *Tampa*, 319-320.

¹⁷ Wimsett was an engineer for the Johnson-Cole Company, which was a lumberyard. Peter O. Knight was the vice president of the company; Sholes' *Tampa City Directory*, 1901. McKay won in each of the four wards; *TMT*, 24 ____ 1902; election figures in *TMT*, 4 June 1902.

¹⁸ The entire ticket of the Good Government League was elected, other than one of its candidates for City Council in the second ward and former mayor Herman Glogowski, who was its candidate for Assessor and Collector; *TMT* 4 June 1902. Frank Wing was defeated in his race to represent the second ward on the Board of Public Works.

¹⁹ *TMT*, 9 April 1902. The CMIU was a member of the Central Trades and Labor Assembly.

²⁰ *TMT*, 28 March 1902; 8 April 1902.

²¹ *TMT*, 10 April 1902; 22 May 1902.

²² W.A. Platt was the spokesperson for the CMIU and for the Tampa Central Trades and Labor Assembly in November 1900 before the arbitration board that had

been appointed by the Tampa City Council in November 1900 to settle the strike. Although Bell tried to arrange a compromise between CMIU and *La Resistencia*, the efforts were unsuccessful; Long, *La Resistencia*. Platt's refusal to accept a compromise to the dispute that had been offered by *La Resistencia* and supported by Bell perhaps contributed to Bell and Platt being on opposing sides in the 1902 election. The other members of the executive committee were Harry Robinson, Augustus J. Russ, and John W. Peters; *TMT*, 20 April 1902. It is unclear if they were union leaders, but all were working class. Robinson was a painter, Russ a box maker, and Peters a paperhanger; Sholes, *Tampa City Directory 1901*.

²³ *TMT*, 28 March 1902.

²⁴ *TMT*, 30 April 1902; 3 June 1902.

²⁵ *TMT*, 6 June 1902. The Good Government League's platform did not explicitly oppose public ownership of utilities, but indicated that it should be considered only "where possible and practical"; *TMT*, 28 March 1902.

²⁶ *TMT*, 28 May 1904.

²⁷ *TMT*, 4 June 1904. Other backers who had been active in the Good Government League two years earlier included John P. Wall, Jr., who had served as the city attorney under McKay and Perry Wall II. Another supporter was J.R. Dekle, who was the co-owner of Jetton-Dekle Lumber Company. The vice-president of this firm was W.D. Wiggins. Both Wiggins and Dekle were elected to the City Council in the 1904 election; *TMT*, 12 March 1904; 5 April 1906.

²⁸ *TMT*, 8 June 1904. S. Elliott, the Socialist candidate, secured only about one percent of the votes (some *TMT* articles spelled the name Elliot, others Eliot, and still others spelled it Elliot). Salomonson received more votes than any of the other candidates in each of the four wards, and won a majority of the votes cast in wards 1 and 4; *TMT*, 8 June 1904.

²⁹ *TMT*, 6 June 1906. Cuscaden had been active in the cattle and citrus businesses; *TMT*, 26 May 1906.

³⁰ Stovall and Edwin Lambright, the *Tribune's* managing editor, who had been active with the Good Government League, claimed that the Seaboard Air Line Railroad, Atlantic Coastline Railroad, and the

Tampa Northern Railroad were all about to spend large sums to improve their facilities. They also argued that the Kendrick group, an organization including Peter O. Knight, would invest heavily in the city; *TMT*, 26 1906. The *Tribune* noted further that the Tampa Gas Company and Tampa Waterworks Company had spent over two million dollars to expand their plants.

³¹ *TMT*, 26 May 1906; 22 April 22 1906. Among Cuscaden's supporters were former mayor James McKay, Jr. and John P. Wall, Jr.; *TMT*, 26 May 1906.

³² Former Citizens' League activists included George Walker, E.R. Gunby, and James Lenfesty; *TMT*, 7 April 1906. Also Don McMullen, who had switched from Frecker to the Voters' Union in the past election now supported the MOA.

³³ *TMT*, 9 June 1906; 16 October 1907; 15 May 15 1906. T.J. Blackmon was with the Carpenters' Union and I.B. Miller was with the Painters' Union. Roberts was elected secretary and treasurer of the state Federation of Labor in 1904. He was again elected secretary and treasurer of the state Federation of Labor at its annual meeting that was held in Tampa in January 1907; *TMT*, 16 January 1907; 19 January 1907; *Florida Times-Union*, 20 June 1904.

³⁴ *TMT*, 5 January 1907; 3 September 1907. Among Tampa's unions that were represented at the convention of the State Federation of Labor in 1907 were the Shipwrights' Union, the Firemen's Protective Association, the Cigarpackers' Union, the Cigarmakers' Union, the Carpenters' Union, and tile Longshoremen's Union. Also represented were the Women's Label League and the Central Trades and Labor Assembly; *TMT*; 16 January 1907.

³⁵ Letter from Peter O. Knight to the Employees of the Tampa Electric Company, 1906, supporting Bowyer, in folder, "Tampa Electric Co. Involvement in Politics: 1906-40." TECO archives.

³⁶ *TMT*, 16 January 1907; 12 October 1907; 20 March 1908; 15 June 1908. In October 1907, the council voted unanimously to support the resolution of Councilman J.A. Roberts that denounced the Western Union Telegraph Company, Postal Telegraph Cable Company, and the Associated Press for its action during the strike of the telegraphers in Tampa. This followed a meeting of the Central Trades and Labor Assembly whose members pledged support for the strike of the telegraph operators, who were calling for higher wages, shorter hours, and equal pay for men

and women. The Board of County Commissioners passed a resolution in 1917 requiring that the union label of the typographical union appear on all printed material of the Commission; *TMT*, 16 October 1907; 24 September 1907; 6 June 1907.

³⁷ *TMT*, 3 June 1908. Wing's strongest support was in the Ybor City Wards 6 and 7, where he garnered more than 60% of the votes. Frecker's strongest showing was in Ward 9 in Tampa Heights, where he gained 63% of the votes; *TMT*, 3 June 1908.

³⁸ *TMT*, 3 May 1908. Former mayor Frank Bowyer supported Wing and Hugh Macfarlane, and E.R. Gunby, who had been the city attorney in the Frecker administration, supported Frecker. Both Gunby and Macfarlane were active in the Republican Party in Hillsborough County, although they sometimes were in separate factions of the party; *TMT*, 3 June 1908; 29 December 1907.

³⁹ The White Municipal Party was recognized by the Tampa City Council in an ordinance that it passed on March 8, 1910. The ordinance called for the City Clerk to open the registration books in his office fifteen days prior to "any white municipal primary election" for the purpose of nominating candidates for the city's general election. No specific mention was made in the ordinance to the fact that only whites would be allowed to vote in the primary elections of the party, but this obviously was understood by Council members.

⁴⁰ Hewitt, "In Pursuit by Power." The City Council ruled that it would accept only original petitions, and then Judge Perry Wall of the Circuit court also refused Green's appeal that his name be placed on the ballot. Wall found Greene was guilty of neglect because he had delayed his appeal for ten days, and then dismissed the case. Wall shortly afterward became the chair of the executive committee of the White Municipal Party. In 1904, the *TMT* reported that L.G. Caro, a "colored" citizen, had applied to run for city council, but had withdrawn his name; 18 May 1904.

⁴¹ As of May 27, 1906, 4,088 whites and 1,314 "colored" had registered to vote for the municipal elections. Thus, of the 5,402 registered voters, blacks constituted 24%. There were virtually no registered blacks in the Third Ward in Hyde Park (15/159) and a relatively small percentage (15%) in the Fourth Ward in Ybor City (171 of 1,154). In the First Ward, 543 of the 1,641 registered voters were black and in the Second Ward 535 of 2,045 were black. The

strongest representation of blacks in the city's seven precincts was in precinct 2 of Ward One, where they were 47% (351/745) of the registered voters. Unlike the Democratic primaries for county offices, no poll taxes were required to register to vote in the city that year; *TMT*, 27 May 1906; 13 April 1906.

⁴² *TMT*, 9 June 1910.

⁴³ J.N. Holmes was the third candidate. He had served on the City Council during the Salomonson, Gillette, and Bowyer administrations. He also sat on the Commission of Public Works from 1906-08, and was appointed by Mayor Wing in his second administration to be chief of sanitation; *TMT*, 6 March 1906.

⁴⁴ *TMT*, 7 April 1910 contained the numerical voting figures. After losing in the first primary, Holmes endorsed Frecker for mayor; *TMT* 27 April 1910.

⁴⁵ *TMT*, 27 April 1910.

⁴⁶ In the 1910 City Council elections, four incumbents were reelected. Thus, seven new persons on the City Council came into office with McKay. The two Socialists who lost to candidates of the White Municipal Party were A. M. Windorst and Angelo Leto; *TMT*, 11 June 1910.

⁴⁷ These included John P. Wall, Perry G. Wall, Arthur Cuscaden, Frank C. Bowyer, the former mayor who was now the president of the Board of Trade, George Raney, Jr., who was serving as the County Solicitor, and M.B. Macfarlane; *TMT*, 26 April 1910; 22 June 1910.

⁴⁸ These included Colonel E.R. Gunby, George Walker, Frank Simonton, Hugh C. Macfarlane, and T.M. Shackleford, Jr., the son of a Florida Supreme Court justice; *TMT*, 25 March 1910; 22 June 1910.

⁴⁹ *TMT*, 25 March 1910.

⁵⁰ Frecker reminded voters that he had worked as a tanner in Boston and Chicago and had been a delegate to the trades assembly in Chicago; *TMT*, 31 March 1910.

⁵¹ *TMT*, 25 March 1910.

⁵² McKay took steps after being elected to ensure more public ownership of the docks, in part due to the insistence of the Corps of Engineers. See Buker, "Tampa's Municipal Wharves," on Tampa's port

development. This article is especially interesting for its treatment of the relationship of private interests to port development.

⁵³ Elliott complained that real estate developers wanted to increase the number of lots in their subdivisions, and thus built streets that were too narrow. He also opposed the system whereby the county leased out convicts to private enterprise. The *TMT* also opposed the convict leasing system; *TMT*, 2 June 1910, 5 June 1910. Although the newspaper gave no biography of Elliott and only referred to him as S. Elliott, he apparently was Spurgeon Elliott, who owned the Big Four Manufacturing Company, which produced cider and vinegar, and was located on Washington Street; see R.L. Polk & Co.'s *Tampa City Directory*, 1909.

⁵⁴ *TMT*, 7 May 1910.

⁵⁵ The *TMT* reported that the returns, excluding Ward 8, showed that McKay was ahead of Elliott, 1,398-248; 8 June 1910. It did not later report the total returns that included Ward 8, but did note that Elliott received a total of 290 votes and that McKay beat Elliott by more than a five to one margin. Elliott did best in Ward 7 (excluding Ward 8), but still lost there 65-28; *TMT*, 11 June 1910; 8 June 1910.

⁵⁶ *TMT*, 7 May 1910.

⁵⁷ *TMT*, 8 June 1910.

⁵⁸ Long, "The Open-Closed Shop Battle."

⁵⁹ Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*, 97-98.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-109.

⁶¹ Hewitt, "Politicizing Domesticity."

⁶² Pozzetta, "Alerta Tabaqueros!," 24.

⁶³ Long, "The Open-Closed Shop Battle."

⁶⁴ *TDT*, 8 April 1912. Also, the city was now divided into ten wards, rather than nine, with the newly annexed territory in East Tampa being made a separate ward. Each of the wards elected one City Council member and one was elected at large.

⁶⁵ *TDT*, 10 April 1912. The terms for City Council members were also extended to four years; however, in this election, candidates from the even-numbered

wards and the at-large seat were elected for two-year terms.

⁶⁶ *TDT*, 23 March 1912; Buker, "Tampa's Municipal Wharves."

⁶⁷ *TMT*, 4 June 1912.

⁶⁸ Hewitt, "Politicizing Domesticity."

⁶⁹ *TMT*, 5 June 1912. Robinson earned over 60% of the votes in Ward 7. McKay received over 90% of the votes in Ward 2 in Hyde Park, and over 85% in Ward 3, also in Hyde Park. He also secured over 85% percent of the votes in Wards 6 and 10, and over 70% in Wards 1 and 5.

⁷⁰ All of the nominees of the White Municipal Party were elected to office in the general elections except for A.N. Goldstein, the party's candidate for council from the Fourth Ward, who lost to an independent candidate. No Socialist candidate was elected; *TMT*, 5 June 1912.

⁷¹ Tampa's city charter that was adopted in 1911 also called for citizens to register before each election; see discussions in the City Council, minutes, 18 April 1911: 56.

⁷² Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, 301. Of the total of 11,691 males twenty-one years of age and older living in Tampa in 1910, 4,407 (37.7%) were foreign born whites. Of the foreign born whites, 919 had become citizens by 1910 (20.9%), 2,765 (62.7%) were still aliens, and the status of 548 was unknown. Also 175 had their "first papers" by this time; Table II. Composition And Characteristics Of The Population For Cities Of 25,000 Or More. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census Of The United States 1910*.

⁷³ Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, and Ingalls, *Urban Vigilantes*.

⁷⁴ See Mormino and Pozzetta, *Immigrant World*, Chapter 6, for a discussion of these institutions. The organization, structures, and relationships among the clubs are among the most fascinating aspects of Ybor City. See Varela-Lago, "From Patriotism to Mutualism," for a discussion of the formation of the Centro Espanol in 1891 and then the Centro Asturiano in 1902. Also see Ferrara, "Tampa's Centro Asturiano Cemetery."

⁷⁵ An example of ethnic support for a politician because he tried to restrain the representatives of the dominant culture who criticized the immigrant

population was in Memphis. For a discussion of ethnic and black support for Ed Crump during this era, see Wald, "The Electoral Base of Political Machines." McKay and most of Tampa's elite also reacted strongly against prohibition. During the race for the state senate in 1908 between Robert McNamee, who was supporting local option on the prohibition issue, and Donald McMullen, who was viewed as being a prohibitionist, they supported McNamee. A businessmen's committee was formed to support a local option that included many who were on opposing sides of political campaigns, including Peter O. Knight, John Wall, Jr., Hugh C. Macfarlane, Thomas M. Weir, C.A. Wimsett, Eduardo Manrara and others; *TMT*, 8 April 1908 and 25 April 1908. The cigar manufacturers, headed by Enrique Pendas, organized to fight prohibition, arguing that it would probably result in the cigar industry leaving Florida; *TMT*, 7 April 1906.

⁷⁶ *TDT*, 6 March 1912; Tampa City Council, minutes, 22 July 1913: 504; 25 April 1913: 414.

⁷⁷ Karl L. Harter was unable to secure more than one-third of the votes in any of the ten wards. His best results were in Ward 7 (32.58%), Ward 10 (30.56%), and Ward 9 (29.59%); tabulated from figures provided in the *TDT*, 7 June 1916. McKay beat Bowyer in eight of the ten wards. Bowyer won by only three votes in Ward 3, and won 65% of the votes in Ward 9, which the Times described as a stronghold of "Freckerism;" *TDT*, 19 April 1920; *TMT*, 20 April 1916. The *TDT*, 18 April 1916 included the registration figures.

⁷⁸ *TDT*, 7 June 1916.

⁷⁹ A state act in 1889 authorized the creation of a Board of Public Works for the City of Tampa. A special legislative act of 1899 amended the charter of the City of Tampa and changed the name of the Board to the Commission of Public Works.

⁸⁰ However, McKay was dissatisfied with them in the later years of his decade in office. In the white primary election in April 1918, McKay supported a citizens' ticket for the Port Commission, because he was dissatisfied with what he interpreted as the inaction of the existing commission. McKay widely praised all the members of this ticket, emphasizing their business and professional accomplishments. In the primary election held on April 23, 1918, all of the Citizens' ticket won seats on the port commission except for one, and they were unopposed in the

general election on June 4; *TDT*, 16 April 1918; 20
April 1918; 24 April 1918; 15 May 1918.