

15 minutes that changed Rhode

By ELMER E. CORNWELL JR.

"COUP D'ETAT" the *Journal* called it the next day. "It savored far more of Central American methods than of those of a commonwealth of the Union." And it was a kind of mild coup d'etat—without tanks surrounding the State House to be sure, as might have been the case in Latin America, but with burly state policemen much in evidence inside. There were no casualties — but then, coups d'etat in our neighbors to the south often are relatively bloodless. No one fled to an embassy of a friendly neighbor for asylum, but three Republican state senators were arrested on warrants issued by the Democratic lieutenant governor so that they would be handy when needed.

Whatever it should have been called, and whatever political traditions it might have been compared with elsewhere, the episode, most often referred to as the Revolution of 1935, did fit a kind of pattern that had developed over the years in "Rogues Island" as we were called in colonial times. There had been, for instance, the burning of the *Gaspee* in 1772. Though this has been hailed as a courageous act of patriotism, technically it was a lawless, even revolutionary act at the time.

In 1842 there was the famous Dorr War. It, like the later Revolution, was bloodless save for an in-

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nocent bystander and a cow, but it was a revolution or civil war of sorts. In 1924, there was the explosion of a bromine gas bomb in the Senate chamber, subsequent pandemonium, followed by the self-exile of the Republican senators at Rutland, Massachusetts, beyond the reach of any warrants that might have been served by the Democratic lieutenant governor.

If speedy carrying out of well laid plans is any basis for calling a political maneuver revolutionary, the

Plans were laid in secret, unveiled in haste.

events of Tuesday, January 1, 1935, deserve the name. According to the heading of one story in Wednesday's *Journal*: "Senate Takes Only 14½ Minutes To Pass Revolutionary Measures." An abbreviated version of the timetable the reporter presents makes the point:

7:19 p.m.—Senate reconvened.

7:22 p.m.—Two Democratic senators sworn in to replace two Republicans whose elections had been found invalid. (The Democrats then had a majority).

7:24 p.m.—Resolution moved and adopted on roll call vacating the seats of all five members of the state's Supreme Court.

7:28 p.m.—Resolution moved and adopted on a voice vote abolishing the Providence Safety Board.

7:32 p.m.—A lengthy bill of 58 pages reorganizing the

whole state government structure introduced.

7:32½ p.m.—This bill was passed.

7:33 p.m.—Motion is made and adopted to transmit these measures to the House for action.

7:33½ p.m.—The Senate recessed on a voice vote.

Well might the *Journal* talk of "haste." That was putting it mildly!

WHAT DID HAPPEN on that January day in 1935 you might well be asking, perhaps with a trace of impatience. Before answering the immediate question, a word or two of background is required. Though it had other very important by-products, the Revolution was basically a long delayed grudge fight between the Republican and Democratic parties.

Governor Theodore Francis Green had been re-elected in November, 1934, for a second term—only the fifth Democrat to serve since the Civil War. His party had not controlled either house of the General Assembly since the turn of the century (and probably since the Civil War).

The Great Depression, the attractiveness of Al Smith as candidate for President in 1928 (the first Democrat to poll a majority in the state since the Civil War), and the great popularity of Franklin Roosevelt were to bring enormous changes. In a word, the state "turned over in bed" politically. From being staunchly Republican, in season and out, Rhode Island became almost equally solidly Democratic.

The immediate background of the Tuesday coup d'etat lay in the fact that, though the Democrats had won the governorship in 1932, and though they had improved their position in the General Assembly, they had still not won control of either house. In fact, they were two seats shy in the House of Representatives, and six short in the Senate. Needless to say they mounted a determined drive in 1934 to capitalize on their momentum and win long sought control of the General Assembly. In November when the ballots had been counted, they found that they had won comfortably in the House with a margin of eight seats. The Senate results were disappointing, however. After the votes were all tabulated, and recounts made in some cases, it appeared that the Republicans had 22 Sena-

tors, to 20 for the Democrats.

Two Senate contests, one each in Portsmouth and South Kingstown, had been decided against the Democrats by very close margins. In Portsmouth, the Democratic challenger came out only 39 votes behind his rival, and in South Kingstown, the Democrat was down a mere 61 votes in a much larger total. A ray of hope seemed to exist in accusations relayed to Lieutenant Governor Robert Quinn that one or both of these two Democrats had been "counted out" by Republican poll officials.

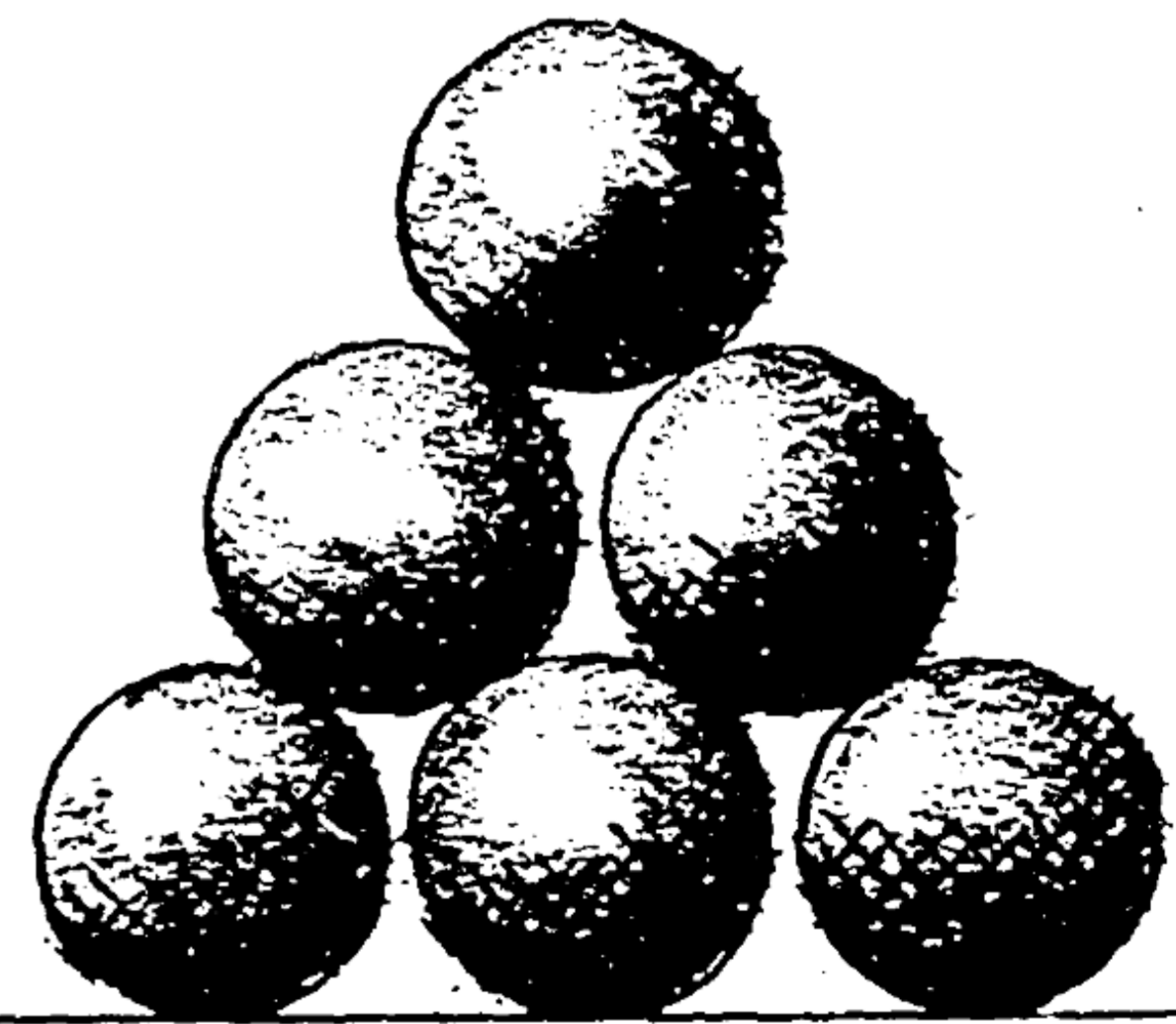
A series of secret meetings was held at Green's home on John Street, in Providence, at which the Democratic big wigs canvassed their situation and laid plans to try to remedy it. These meetings somehow escaped the notice of the *Providence Journal* and as a result the battle plan that

continued on

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DEMOCR AND S BOA



Island

unfolded inauguration day, January 1st, came as a total surprise.

The paper was aware of another series of meetings, and reported on Sunday, December 30th, it had learned unofficially that "By far the most comprehensive plan ever suggested for reorganization of the Rhode Island State Government has been incorporated in a voluminous bill agreed on and ready to be introduced by Democratic leaders..." The accuracy of the *Journal's* information on this reform proposal suggests that word may well have been leaked, perhaps to throw reporters off the scent of other planning efforts.

THE NEWSPAPER which participants and observers of the events soon to come read over their

morning coffee New Year's Day, 1935, was strangely and unintentionally prophetic. Its story on the launching of the new political season began:

"A new year packed with the possibility of more dramatic and far reaching political action than Rhode Island has witnessed in a decade will descend upon the State House at noon today when the General Assembly convenes for the second inauguration of Governor Theodore Francis Green."

When the two houses convened at mid-day, attention naturally focused on the Senate. It met following a Democratic caucus at which those present were given their first information about the drama in which they were to play pre-determined parts. When Lieutenant Governor Quinn called the Senate to order, all 42 members that had

been elected, or thought they had been elected, the previous November were in their seats.

Immediately upon banging the gavel, Quinn announced that he had received protests against seating either Senator-elect B. Earl Anthony of Portsmouth or Wallace Campbell of South Kingstown. Both were dumbfounded. Campbell's desk was heaped with flowers sent by well-wishers. But before any Republican had had time to catch his breath, the presiding officer ordered all of the assembled members sworn in—except Anthony and Campbell.

This done, the Senate Democratic floor leader, Senator William G. Troy of Providence, arose and nominated former Alderman John J. McGrane of Providence as Senate reading

clerk to replace the Republican who had served in the previous session. The nomination was speedily seconded. Quinn quickly called for other nominations, but before any Republican could take advantage of his fleeting opportunity, called for a vote on McGrane which he declared to have carried. Again, no member of the opposition party even had time or presence of mind to shout "nay" much less call for a record vote.

The moment the gavel banged on the rostrum signifying that that business had been dispatched, Senator Troy was again on his feet. This time he offered a resolution providing for the appointment of a three-member committee of senators to get the Portsmouth and South Kingstown ballots from the secretary of

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PROVIDENCE, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 1935

PRICE TWO CENTS

ATS TURN OUT SUPREME COURT FETY BOARD, DISCARD 80 STATE ARDS; BAR 2 REPUBLICAN SENATORS

ROOSEVELT HINTS LOUISIANA MIGHT LOSE PWA LOANS

unds May Be Withheld Until
Some of Long's Laws
Are Repealed.

SENATOR LETTER

Question Given That Kingfish's
Debt Meritum" Questioned
By Administration

Washington, Jan. 1—(AP)—Pres.
Roosevelt has indirectly in-
dicated Senator Huey P. Long that
Administration is likely to with-
hold public works loans from Louisiana
until some of the legislation the

Alabama Defeats Stanford 29 to 13 Before 85,000

Dixie Howell Thrills Throng With One of Greatest
Gridiron Exhibitions Ever Seen; Southerners Win
After Trailing 7 to 0 in Second Quarter

BY GRANTLAND RICE

Pasadena, Cal. Jan. 1—(AP)—Dixie Howell, the famous howler from Hartford, Ala., blasted the Stanford Bruins today with one of the greatest all-around exhibitions that football has ever known. The slender strapping from Hartford, weighing 183 pounds, led a passing, kicking and running attack that beat a big, game Stanford team 29 to 13 in 85,000 seats beneath a blue California sky and saw the crowd cheer with a full of flying footballs thrown from Howell's rifle-shot hand into Dan Hutson's waiting arms.

Howell gave his impression of a "Duce" Dean Hutson, who

GREEN CALLS FOR CONSOLIDATION IN 11 DEPARTMENTS

Message to Assembly Pro-
poses Plan Merging More
Than 80 State Agencies.

SUGGESTS UTILITY STUDY

Urges Making Courts "Non-Parti-
san" by Naming Democrats.
Asks Safety Board Abolition

Governor Theodore Francis Green, in his annual message early today recommended the consolidation of more than 80 State agencies under 11 departments, urged making the courts non-partisan by the election

SUPT. E. J. KELLY GIVEN SAFETY BOARD REINS

Flynn, Condon, Moss, Baker, Capotosto Go to Supreme Bench

11-DEPARTMENT REORGANIZATION VOTED

Finance Commissioner Abolished; Budget Director
Named; Democrats from South Kingstown
and Portsmouth Seated in Senate

Rhode Island Democrats, functioning with a perfectly drilled and air-tight organization, yesterday seized control of the Senate, thus commanding both branches of the General Assembly, and before the first crowded hours of the opening session, were expected to have

GOVERNOR AND OTHER INAUGURATED

And after they had completed their opening business transactions inaugurated Governor Robert E. Quinn last November.

The first joint Democratic Chief Justice Associate man from the Assistant At- tending Justice former Assoc- The first Capotosto are Republicans who were bers of the Superior Court. Their ele- two vacancies on that bench, which will

Shortly after midnight, all mem- Supreme Court except Mr. Condon was State House. Congressman Condon had Washington and was expected to come

QUINN NAMED SHER

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REVOLUTION

State troopers
were called in

state's vault, count the votes cast for the two Senate seats and report back their findings. This too was quickly put to a voice vote and declared passed before any Republican could get on his feet to obtain recognition.

Senator Harry T. Bodwell of Cranston, the Republican floor leader, did rise and try to move the adoption of the previous session's rules, but his motion failed to receive a second, and meanwhile Troy had called for a recess. This

was quickly put to a vote and carried, though this time at least one Republican had found his voice and called out "no."

THE RESOLUTION setting up the special committee to count the ballots

was quickly transmitted to the House, passed there, and signed by the Governor. Meanwhile, the Democrats—probably with the Republican exit to Massachusetts in 1924, effectively denying the Senate a quorum, in mind—moved to prevent their plans from being spoiled in the same manner.

Republican members did begin leaving the State House for their homes, but warrants were ready for the arrest of three, for one of whom, Archibald Kenyon of Richmond, the Democratic leadership had plans. Another of the three succeeded in leaving the building before the state troopers sent to arrest him could carry out their assignment. The third was found in his office (where he performed his duties as state labor commissioner). He submitted to arrest and ended up treating his captors to supper in the State House restaurant. Kenyon made no attempt to leave the building.

House passage and signature completed, Lieutenant Governor Quinn called the Senate back into brief session. The three-member committee was appointed to consist of two Democrats and one Republican, Senator Kenyon. The Senate again recessed to reconvene when the committee was ready to report.

Awaiting this ad hoc canvassing body in the office of the secretary of state was the Republican deputy secretary. He had the combination of the vault, and the ever careful Democrats had stationed a state trooper with him. They even had lunch sent to him as he waited, not knowing why the precautions were being taken. When the committee appeared and asked for the ballots, the deputy secretary of state complied, possibly because two more state troopers had entered, each carrying a heavy



Lighter than Scotch,
smoother than Canadian.



What a whiskey. We made it a very special way, for a taste no other can match. All the character of the beautiful imports, plus a touch of genuine USA flavor. If you want to know what's really happening, try new Four Roses Premium. You've got to taste it to believe it.

New Four Roses Premium
Made like no other to taste like no other.

sledge to use on the door if necessary.

IT IS LIKELY that no one will ever know what really went on in the committee room where the ballots were then re-examined and re-tabulated, nor whether any advance approach had been made to Kenyon. He was interviewed by a *Journal* reporter afterward, and described the process he and his colleagues followed in their count.

He was the first to handle each ballot, he said, whereupon he stated his opinion of it and passed it over to the two Democrats. Senator Kenyon is quoted directly by the reporter as having said: "I'm satisfied that the count we made was fair, that all the ballots we counted should have been counted, and that those we threw out, should have been thrown out."

Upon the completion of the committee's work, the Senate again reconvened, as noted earlier, at 7:19 p.m. It accepted the report, in which the three members unanimously found that Republicans Anthony and Campbell had *not* been properly elected, and that therefore the two Democrats, Joseph P. Dunn of Portsmouth and Dr. Charles A. White Sr. of South Kingstown, should be sworn in. Dunn, they found, had won by 10 votes, White by 26. As we have seen, the seating of the two Democrats was accomplished with dispatch, whereupon the Senate proceeded to its substantive business.

COMMENT on one or two of the items which the upper chamber (and ultimately the Assembly) passed with such breathtaking efficiency is in order. The Democrats had more than one grudge against the Supreme Court besides its chronic Republican com-

plexion. In an opinion handed down in 1883 the court had held that the General Assembly was without power to call a convention to revise the state constitution, thus leaving only the cumbersome amendment process as a means of making changes. The Democrats had long sought alteration of the legislative apportionment formula which weighed heavily in favor of the Republican small towns. There were also election decisions in the past that rankled and seemed partisanly motivated. A newly constituted court would presumably be more sympathetic.

The abolition of the Providence Safety Board is of less long term importance. In previous years the General Assembly had enacted legislation which placed control of the city's police and fire departments in this state-appointed board, a move that the Democrats resented and insisted was a denial of home rule.

THE executive branch reform legislation, the one part of the whole scenario which had been known in advance, may well have been the most important reform enacted that January 1st. Some of the motives of the Democrats were clearly quite immediate and involved patronage: disestablishing jobs out from under Republicans and creating a new set that they themselves could fill with their supporters. In long range terms, however, the result was to provide badly needed modernization of the state government structure, replacing a host of autonomous boards, commissions and agencies with (at that time) nine new departments in which all functions could be brought together and coordinated.

The office of governor was also greatly strengthened by the reform. The

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March 12, 1972

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*It started late at night in a desolate cove
in Pine Point, Maine, where a small boy
with a rake was working in dead earnest.*

Accompanied only by his shadow,
he scraped in the sand at low tide,
remembering his father's last
words to him: "Take care of your
mother and sisters, son. And
never settle for less than the best."

Digging clams was what young
Fred Snow knew how to do best.

At first, he dug just enough for
his kin. As he grew, he dug more
than they could eat. So he sold
them. Then he dug more than he
could sell. So he made clam
chowder and sold that.

The basic chowder recipe was
inherited from Fred's father,
Captain Enoch Snow. It was
simple and honest, and so good he
couldn't make enough. The busi-
ness got bigger and bigger, but
we still can't make enough. After
all, there are only so many clams,
and we won't scrimp on them.

Today, the family's still in the
business. And the business is still
in Pine Point, where the sea-beaten
dunes hold back the 20th century.

Here in New England, people
buy more Snow's Clam Chowder
than any other kind. Maybe that's
because it's an honest value. An
exact awareness of even a one-
cent difference is at the very
basis of the New England mind.
Maybe it's all those clams, which
make it hearty enough for a main
course. Or that we've had over
50 years to earn people's trust.

Because it gets kind of lonely
up here, we'd love to hear what
you think of our chowder. Write
us in Pine Point, Maine 04064,
and we'll send you back our
collection of old New England
seafood recipes. But even if you
don't have time to write, do try
our chowder. It's like hot velvet
when winter is rattling around
outside and you've high-tailed it
home after working all day in
dead earnest.



Snow's Clam Chowder.
There's a streak
of Yankee cussedness
in every can.

REVOLUTION

A star fell on Chicago

state's chief executive had had relatively little control over the former board members and agency heads. Most were beholden to the General Assembly. He could therefore be chief executive in name only. Since the new legislation specifically empowered the governor to appoint the new department heads, and provided that they serve during his pleasure, he could assume genuine responsibility for the conduct of state business.

Finally, all of these changes, as we noted at the beginning, had the collective effect of ushering in and confirming an era of Democratic control of the state government which, with a few relatively brief and partial Republican interludes, has extended down to the present.

We might end this account with one alleged reaction to events in Little Rhody that fateful first of January. I have been told that when Colonel Robert R. McCormick, the then publisher of the *Chicago Tribune* and an ardent Republican of quite conservative persuasion, heard of the doings in Providence, he ordered the huge flag that hung in the lobby of the Tribune Tower taken down, and one star—Rhode Island's—torn off. Thus did the annoyed Colonel read our state out of the union for its sins.

He was later informed, so the story goes, that desecration of the flag was a federal offense, and reluctantly had the star restored. □