The New Jersey Governor: A Study in Political Power

DUANE LOCKARD

The New Jersey Historical Series

Volume 14

The New Jersey Historical Series

The New Jersey Governor

A STUDY IN POLITICAL POWER

DUANE LOCKARD

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To
The
Memory
of
V. O. Key, Jr.

FOREWORD

Many tracks will be left by the New Jersey Tercentenary celebration, but few will be larger than those made by the New Jersey Historical Series. The Series is a monumental publishing project—the product of a remarkable collaborative effort between public and private enterprise.

New Jersey has needed a series of books about itself. The 300th anniversary of the State is a fitting time to publish such a series. It is to the credit of the State's Tercentenary Commission that this series has been created.

In an enterprise of such scope, there must be many contributors. Each of these must give considerably of himself if the enterprise is to succeed. The New Jersey Historical Series, the most ambitious publishing venture ever undertaken about a state, was conceived by a committee of Jerseymen—Julian P. Boyd, Wesley Frank Craven, John T. Cunningham, David S. Davies, and Richard P. McCormick. Not only did these men outline the need for such an historic venture; they also aided in the selection of the editors of the series.

Both jobs were well done. The volumes speak for themselves. The devoted and scholarly services of Richard M. Huber and Wheaton J. Lane, the editors, are a part of every book in the series. The editors have been aided in their work by two fine assistants, Elizabeth Jackson Holland and Bertha DeGraw Miller.

To D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. my special thanks for recognizing New Jersey's need and for bringing their

skills and publishing wisdom to bear upon the printing and distributing of the New Jersey Historical Series.

My final and most heartfelt thanks must go to Duane Lockard, who accepted my invitation to write *The New Jersey Governor: A Study in Political Power,* doing so at great personal sacrifice and without thought of material gain. We are richer by his scholarship. We welcome this important contribution to an understanding of our State.

RICHARD J. HUGHES
Governor of the
State of New Jersey

January, 1964

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to the generous assistance of many friends this is a better book than it could possibly have been without them. Richard Huber, co-editor of the New Jersey Tercentenary Historical Series, originally suggested that I write this book and he has provided counsel and encouragement throughout its preparation. The Princeton University Research Fund gave me a grant which permitted me to engage John H. Strange as a research assistant. He collected biographical information on the governors, assembled election data, and prepared drafts of the tables and graphs. I am most grateful for his conscientious and imaginative assistance. John F. Sly, Professor Emeritus of Princeton University, interrupted his own work frequently to advise. me. His rich experience in New Jersey government and his association with all the governors of recent decades made him an invaluable source of insights and information. My daughters, Linda, Janet, and Leslie, helpfully did small research chores for me during the steamy weeks of the summer of 1963.

Finally and most importantly I want to thank the readers of the manuscript. Their careful and painstaking criticism saved me from more errors than I like to admit. I greatly appreciate the suggestions and corrections made by John Bebout, Ronald Grele, Richard P. McCormick, Bennett Rich, and Paul Tillett. My wife, Beverly, improved style with her ruthless blue pencil; for that and much other assistance I am grateful to her.

DUANE LOCKARD

Princeton, New Jersey
January, 1964

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE

FROM PHILIP CARTERET, the first English governor who took office in 1664, to Richard J. Hughes, the incumbent on the occasion of New Jersey's Tercentenary, 66 men have served as governor of the colony and state.* Reviewing the careers of these men and the development of the office one is struck by two things. First, the name "governor" is about all that has remained constant about the positon. Although the general trend has been for the governorship to gain in power and prestige over the centuries, the line of development has been anything but steadily upward. In fact the governor's relative influence in New Jersey government and politics has fluctuated from zero to zenith, often within a remarkably short time. Second, these 66 men have been an incredibly assorted lot. Some were rogues and thieves; some were the mere agents of powerful outsiders (like business moguls or party bosses); some were amiable nonentities, adept at platitude and evasion, who served their terms and passed into deserved oblivion. But there were others. Some were men of firmness, ability, and principle who would com-

* This figure is arrived at by excluding from the count several short-term deputy governors during the colonial era and the more than one hundred "acting governors" who as presidents of the Council, or of the Senate after 1844, exercised the powers of the governor during his absence from the state or when the office fell vacant due to death or resignation.

pare well with any group of chiefs of state drawn from a comparable society that developed in three centuries from a collection of a few hundred hardy settlers to a metropolitan state of six million people.

The careers of the good, the bad, and the indifferent are equally pertinent to this inquiry. Through their administrations one can trace the evolution of state government, illustrating changing conceptions, values, behavior patterns, and distributions of political power. Much of what has been written about the New Jersey governorship (and that of other states as well) has overemphasized the role of the constitution in determining the relative effectiveness of a governor's leadership. Without denying the importance of the constitution as one source of a governor's potential power, the question persists: how can we explain wide variations in the degree of power wielded by two governors within the same decade when no constitutional changes have taken place? The answer must be found in other political phenomena.

Hence this is called a study of "political power." The term does not mean to me something derogative or petty but something comprehensive, involving all the things that men can do or draw upon to influence others to take desired actions on matters of public policy. Political power thus involves such elements as a governor's personal qualities, his formal authority, the alliances he makes, the reputation he acquires, and the sources of rewards or punishments he commands. Whether a governor will prevail in a dispute over policy (or even whether he will be significantly involved) is the resultant of a subtle combination of factors, not of any single determinant.

A governor who lacks the personal qualities of leadership, or who has no great desire to make new laws or otherwise shape policy, acquires a reputation for weakness. Inevitably this invites others active in state affairs either to ignore him or to risk defying him. A governor who possess the same formal authority but has a strong will to power and is personally persuasive may develop exactly the opposite reputation with the result that other

politicians will defer to him rather than resist. What Richard Neustadt has said of the President is equally applicable here to the governor. "If he cannot make men think him bound to win, his need is to keep them from thinking they can cross him without risk, or that they can be sure what risks they run." * A reputation for strength is dependent upon more than personal qualities, however. Possession of the means to punish or reward is also important; thus close association with a strong political-party organization or with powerful economic groups enhances a governor's potential. Wide authority to appoint and remove personnel may combine with other bases of power to make the governor's position a formidable one. Or authority to appoint and remove may mean little because of the absence of other empowering factors.

Evaluating the power potential of a single governor is no simple undertaking, and searching for evidence of changing power sources over a three-century period is infinitely more complicated, since there is limited information readily available for some periods of New Jersey history. But even if there were more data available complete certainty about the reasons for gubernatorial effectiveness would be next to impossible to achieve. Nevertheless by examining the changing general bases of gubernatorial power we can at least reveal the significant factors in the power equation even if we cannot quantify their relative weights with precision. By a "base" of political power I mean a resource on which a governor may draw.** As a nation's base of power in international affairs would be (in part) its economy and its military capacity, so an official's base of power is the personal and institutional sources of strength he can call upon. As noted above a governor's personal qualities can be a source of power. The dynamic and magnetic personality

* Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power* (New York, 1960), 64.

** This method of assessing power derives from Robert Dahl's theory presented in his article *"The Concept of Power," Behavioral Science,* II, 201-215.

of a "born" leader attracts others to him and inspires loyalty and cooperation. Capacity to comprehend complex issues and to communicate effectively are indispensable tools of persuasion. Courage to take risks, the will to persist, and the political sense to perceive the point where moderation should supplant firmness are prerequisites to effectiveness for a chief executive. Partly out of such intangibles is a reputation created; once achieved, it is a source of continuing power.

A second base of power is the support of interest groups and/or organizations. Again to employ an analogy from international politics, it is a matter of alliances: of having supporting strength in reserve. If a governor can draw upon the power, prestige, and wealth of a dominant business group, as many nineteenth-century governors did, he has a formidable source of power. Similarly a party organization and the loyalties and identifications that New Jersey politicians have toward party are important sources of power. Ambitious politicians submit to leadership and discipline in anticipation of future rewards. Prospects of the party's winning the next election can be a potent force in the hands of a governor who argues that specific legislation or actions are indispensable to holding or winning public support in the next election. Party is thus a dual source of power. Besides being an organization that can reward or punish, it is also an object of identification for voters and politicians which facilitates a governor's efforts to get support.

Another base of power is the constitutional-legal authorization for the governor to exercise certain prerogatives. Appointment and removal power, as stated in the constitution and amplified in statute law, is an obvious example. The power to veto legislation, to serve more than one term, and to direct agencies are other examples.

It is important to recognize that the constitutional factor is not solely a matter of words in a document. The language of constitutions and statutes is subject to interpretation and to reinterpretation as time passes. Indeed

a constitution in its most meaningful sense is the document plus its interpretations and the beliefs of the public as to what it ought to mean. An example from the United States Constitution will illustrate the point. The apparent intent of the framers of the Constitution was that presidential electors should exercise their personal judgment in voting for a president. Early electors did so. Gradually the practice of instructing electors through popular election became common, and the voters themselves soon expected to be the direct decision-makers. As early as 1812 the choice of electors by popular vote was so firmly accepted in New Jersey that the Federalist party further diminished its survival chances by repealing popular election and reverting to the old method of choosing electors by the Legislators.* Today, a presidential elector who refuses to abide by the popular vote is accused of violating the Constiution.

In the same fashion attitudes have changed about the constitutional position of the New Jersey governor. As fear of the executive declined, and mass-based political activity expanded, the governor became not only more visible but much more powerful. Governors gradually came informally to exercise certain kinds of power which subsequent constitutional changes formally endorsed. Repeatedly one finds constitution-makers ratifying an existing situation more than innovating new practices; they put into the formal constitution political practices that had won common acceptance, partly because they had become commonplace. Thus the 1776 constitution created a governor in the mold of the actually weak (although formally strong) royal governor; the 1844 constitution formally gave to the governor appointment and other powers that party-leader governors had begun to acquire informally; the 1947 constitution endorsed and expanded chief-executive control over the bureaucracy which had been growing for decades.

To facilitate identification of the broad changes in

* See Walter R. Fee, *The Transition from Aristocracy to Democracy in New Jersey, 1789-1829* (Somerville, 1933), 182-183.