

CHAPTER VI

THE REFORM MOVEMENT AND MARYLAND PROGRESSIVISM

The Election of 1896 to 1928

Approaching the twentieth century the state of Maryland was in the midst of a period of dynamic growth which would transform its character and the attitudes of its people. The economy was changing from an agrarian base to reliance on industry and manufacturing.¹ The demographic shifts gave Maryland a clear distinction between the rural counties and the urban center of Baltimore City. The Federal census in 1900 shows Maryland with a population of 1,188,044 of which 42.84 percent, or 508,957, lived in Baltimore City. This heavy concentration of the state's citizens reached its peak of 50.62 percent in 1920 (733,826 out of 1,449,661) after Baltimore City's last annexation of county land in 1918.² Unlike other industrial American cities, Baltimore's population growth came more from native Americans than immigrants during this period which is consistent with the stable or declining population of many rural Maryland counties.³

The economic and social changes from 1890 through the 1920s brought corresponding changes in the political attitudes and election results of the period. Labeled the "Progressive Era,"⁴ Marylanders first shook off the domination of the "bosses" and weathered fights over the ballot and suffrage. The Democrats, from party boss Senator Gorman in the 1880s to the magnetic personal cult of Governor Ritchie in the 1920s, represented a link with the traditional past and the placing of states' rights above national issues. The Republicans, typified by the educated, articulate reformer, Charles J. Bonaparte,⁵ represented progress, change and the future. During the "progressive era" in Maryland the state operated under a two-party political system which had the benefit of producing good government along with the bad from both sides of the aisle.

From 1896 through 1928, Republicans enjoyed unparalleled success in Maryland. Republican electors would finish with the most votes in seven out of the nine presidential elections. Woodrow Wilson's successes in 1912 and 1916 constituted the only interruption in the Republican string of successes and these results were assisted by the Roosevelt-Taft split in the national Republican party. During this time the state Republicans enjoyed their only control of the Maryland General Assembly capturing a majority of the House of Delegates in 1895 and 1917 and gaining control of both the lower House and the State Senate in 1897. In the 102 congressional races from 1896 through 1928, the Republicans won 48, including sweeps of the House of Representatives' positions in 1896 and 1900. Three of the seven direct elections for U.S. Senator were Republican victories during this period (1916, 1920, 1928) and the Governor's mansion was won twice (1895 and 1911).