

Chapter 265 –Slavery Supporters Suffer Another Loss When Kansas Voters Reject The “English Bill”



Dates:
August 1858

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- The End Arrives For The Pro-Slavery Lecompton Constitution
 - The Kansas Defeat Is Costly To Buchanan, Douglas And The Democrat Party

Date: August 2, 1858

The End Arrives For The Pro-Slavery Lecompton Constitution



Among Those Hoping For Freedom

The Second of August 1858 marks a major turning point in the history of the Kansas Territory.

For almost four years the will of the territory’s residents on slavery has been dictated by a sequence of electoral frauds carried out by the Missouri Border Ruffians. These begin in November 1854 with polling to choose the first representative to Congress. They continue with the rigged election of the so-called “bogus legislature” in March 1855, which hands control over to its pro-slavery members to draft a state constitution.

The result of their work is the Lecompton document, written in December 1857 and sent to Congress for admission to the union. It designates Kansas as a Slave State.

Over the next five months, James Buchanan and his Southern supporters try every tactic they can think of to force members of the U.S. House to approve Lecompton. They do so even though it has never been voted upon by the public, a clear violation of the Democratic Party’s commitment to popular sovereignty.

When not only the Republicans, but also their own Senator Stephen Douglas, refuse to cave in, the Democrats attach the threatening “English Bill” to the body of the Lecompton Constitution, hoping that Kansans will support it rather than face an indefinite delay in achieving statehood and securing public domain acreage.

On August 2, 1858, residents of Kansas go to the polls to approve or reject the Lecompton Constitution.

The result is an overwhelming defeat for Buchanan and for the South.

Public Vote On Lecompton: August 2, 1858

	Votes
For The Constitution + English Bill	1,788
Against The Constitution	11,300

Date: Summer 1858

The Kansas Defeat Is Costly To Buchanan, Douglas And The Democrat Party

By the time Governor James Denver resigns his post on September 1, 1858, James Buchanan’s presidency has suffered a string of setbacks from which it will never recover. Chief among these are his willingness to ignore obvious election fraud to pass the Lecompton Constitution for his southern backers; failure to stem the financial panic; his feckless pardon of the Mormon insurrectionists; and his repeated failures to listen to, and retain, his designated Governors in Kansas and to stabilize the open warfare there.

Some Key Set-Backs In Buchanan’s First 18 Months In office

1857	
March 4	Inauguration Day
March 6	The <i>Dred Scott</i> ruling encounters resistance
March 20	Governor Geary resigns
July 15	Governor Walker declares Kansas in rebellion
August 24	Ohio Bank collapse begins financial panic
October 5	Free State Party wins official Kansas legislature
December 15	Governor Walker resigns
December 18	Douglas defies Buchanan support for Lecompton
1858	
April 6	Controversial pardon given to the Mormons
May 19	Massacre at Marais des Cygnes
August 2	Kansas voters reject the English Bill
September 1	Denver submits his resignation

Buchanan’s defeats are also shared by the Democratic Party writ large.

The manipulations to pass the Lecompton Constitution make a mockery of the party’s long-standing commitment to popular sovereignty as the only fair way to resolve the future of slavery.

In turn they force Stephen Douglas to speak out against a Democratic President, and in so doing to further the internal divide between the Southern and Northern factions in the party.

With the English Bill now dead and Kansas in the Free State column, the South turns its attention to trying to convert the *Dred Scott* decision into a Congress-approved law guaranteeing slave owners the right to bring their “property” into any of the new Territories and settle down in advance of admission to statehood.

Northerners meanwhile turn their eyes toward the Illinois senate race and the debates between Douglas and his Republican adversary, Abraham Lincoln, which are sure to turn on the slavery issues.