

Why Do Third Parties Form Against Duverger's Law?

The Case from the Post-Civil War U.S.

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Introduction

“Why are not the parties more numerous? Why, too, are the [two major] parties so persistent?” Closely observing the U.S. politics at the turn of the twentieth century, James Bryce posed this question in his much-celebrated *The American Commonwealth*. After pointing out as one of the possible causes that there was a feeling prevalent among Americans against regional political parties, he referred to “the enormous trouble and expense required to found a new national party” as another reason why there were so few third, or minor, parties.¹

Launching a political party and fighting elections is an extremely costly business. Nonetheless, it can safely be said that the students of party politics, especially those of U.S. party politics, have largely taken the presence of parties, including minor parties, as given. Such a tendency is particularly well reflected in the studies of the relationship between electoral and party systems. Ever since the so-called Duverger’s Law, which states that the first-past-the-post electoral rule “favors” the two-party system, made its appearance in the 1950s, scholars have piled up an enormous number of works in their efforts to identify the conditions which *eliminate* third parties under such an electoral rule. It should be obvious, however, that there has to be a third party before it can be eliminated.

But if the organization of a political party requires so much effort, there is no reason to assume that third parties should somehow always be there in the American electoral field. This should be doubly true when we take into account the prevailing view that third parties would almost always suffer severe defeat whenever they participate in elections. If this is truly the case, why would someone want to start a third party in the first place? This is the question that drives this research.

¹ James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), II, pp. 724-726. For stylistic reasons, the terms “third party” and “minor party” are used interchangeably throughout the text.

It is not so hard to come up with answers to this question for a couple of types of third party. Many of the “major” minor parties that appeared in U.S. history, such as the Free Soilers, the Liberal Republicans, and the Progressives, were splinter parties organized by a group of politicians who had already been active inside a major party. Feeling alienated by the party or parties that served as their political home, they were trying to overcome a frustrating situation by creating their own party. In doing so, they were able to mobilize the organizational resources they had accumulated over the years as leaders of a major party. The same can be said to a certain degree for those prominent individuals who organized a third party for their bids for the presidency, like George Wallace, John Anderson, and Ross Perot. Although it is not certain whether they thought they could really win, they could count on whatever resources available to them, including their fame and/or wealth.

Unfortunately, such an explanation cannot be readily applied to many, if not most, of the minor parties that originated differently, neither starting within a major party nor around a prominent individual. Particularly intriguing among these cases are those that were launched by social movements with particular policy goals in mind. In contrast to the third parties discussed above, it is by no means clear why their leaders felt they had to suddenly turn the movements into political parties. This is especially true for those movements that had already achieved some success through their existing activities. Not only had they good reason to stick to their original political strategy; by abandoning it, they were going to risk losing the support of their followers. So why would anyone bother to do so?

This is the question to be tackled in this paper. In doing so, I will take up the two social movements, the prohibitionists² and labor reformers, that respectively organized, or at least

² Although prohibitionists are usually understood as a part of the larger temperance reform in the context of U.S. history and will be treated as such here, too, they will receive special attention in this paper which focuses on the political aspect of the movement.

tried to organize, third parties shortly after the Civil War, and analyze why they did so. There are a couple of reasons why I believe these particular movements are worthy of close attention. To begin with, as I will explain later, they were among the most powerful and successful of the social movements of the era, meaning that they had plenty to lose if their attempt to form an independent political organization ended in failure. The two cases thus provide us with “hard cases” that are difficult to explain but that would be a source of considerable insight if the puzzle could be solved.

It is true that we cannot explain why minor parties appear from outside the major parties in a general way just by looking at these two nineteenth-century cases. But these cases are not only representative of the many social movements that formed political parties; they are also special in the sense that they were arguably the first to do so. To be sure, several attempts were made by social movements to start political parties in the antebellum period, including that of the workingmen in the 1820s. Aside from being sporadic in terms of both time and space, however, there is the problem that they cannot really be called attempts to create “third” parties, since the term presupposes the presence of a stable *two*-party system. After all, it was only around 1840 when the first national two-party system began functioning, and the system collapsed within a generation.³

With this historical context in mind, it might not be too much of an overstatement to say that analyzing the two post-Civil War cases might lead to a better understanding of the *origins* of third-party politics, or at least that of this one particular kind, in the U.S. These two parties form only a part of what can be called the “first wave” of third-party challenges that lasted at least until the Populist revolt at the end of the century, which involved an attempt to

³ Joel H. Silbey, *The American Political Nation, 1838-1893* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

create an alliance of existing third parties.⁴ Rather than focusing on just one of the parties, comparing two movements that had radically different policy goals but shared the timing and the manner of organizational transformation should enable us, albeit in a limited sense, to distill the causes that are common to them. In order to achieve this goal, I will investigate the motivations of the leaders of these movements who led the way to the formation of new political parties, analyzing their incentives and closely relating them with the political opportunity structures that surrounded them. While doing so, I will treat the leaders as goal-oriented actors who tried to maximize the chance of realizing the policy they pursued, rather than narrow-sighted zealots who had little grasp of political reality, as they have often been depicted.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, after briefly reviewing the limits of the existing research on this subject, I will explain my analytical framework in a more extensive manner. Here I will introduce the key notions of organizational repertoire and organizational form, which have so far been used primarily by sociologists studying social movements. The next two sections will be devoted to tackle the two subproblems to be solved to achieve this paper's goal. In the second section, I will show why the movement leaders came to think that creating a political party was more suited to bring about their desired policy change than their previous mode of action. The third section will demonstrate why they thought that they had a fair chance of winning the elections once they formed a political party. The central argument of these two sections is that the rise of the Republican Party and its conduct of the federal government during the Civil War, which occurred just

⁴ Cf. Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 31-32. The following studies share with me the view on the origins of the populist party. Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Scott G. McNall, *The Road to Rebellion: Class Formation and Kansas Populism, 1865-1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

before the movement leaders made their decisions to create their own parties, provided them with new and positive ways of looking at political parties and the party system. The last section concludes the discussion by pointing out the historiographical and theoretical implications of my findings in the preceding sections.

1. Political Party as Part of Organizational Repertoires

For a long time, the study of the party systems of nations whose elections for major public offices are conducted under the first-past-the-post rule have paid special attention to the affinity between the rule and the two-party system. Almost half a century after Maurice Duverger presented his famous thesis on the subject, which eventually turned into a “law,” political scientists have discovered the conditions that would realize the “Duvergerian equilibrium” that would bring down the number of parties to two, thanks to the rapid development of formal theories, culminating in the publication of Gary Cox’s *Making Votes Count*.⁵

While this is no doubt a splendid achievement, it has to be admitted that third parties have been largely neglected during the course of such research. Since scholars have been focusing on finding out how the two-party system (with only two parties) would emerge, minor parties were treated as disruption or noise in relation to the “law.” But it is now apparent that they cannot be ignored, as it has been shown that the equilibrium would be reached only under certain circumstances. In other situations, third parties would be present. The recent shift in scholarship towards the analysis of the general relationship between the number of political parties in a political system and its causes, including the electoral system,

⁵ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (Cambridge, U.K.: University Printing House, 1954), pp. 215-217; Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count: Strategic Coordination in the World’s Electoral Systems* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), esp. Chs. 4 and 10.

seems only natural in this regard.⁶ The rise of the Liberal Democrats in the U.K. and that of the Greens and the Reformers in the U.S. during the last couple of decades also suggest the importance of such a research agenda.

Even though research interest in third parties is on the rise, few scholars have tried to explain why they emerge in the first place. This is curious when, as has already been mentioned, the notion of the hardships facing third parties is widely shared. Or, it may be the case that such an understanding has led scholars to think that the motives of third party leaders, aside from those of a few splinter parties such as the Progressives, are not worth explaining in relation to electoral victory. In the meantime, the political scientists and historians who have studied third parties have largely concentrated on the electorate, trying to figure out who voted for them and why they did so, thereby also taking the parties' presence as given.⁷

Perhaps unable to come up with any reason why third-party leaders would think that they could win any election, political scientists and historians have all too often described the function of their challenge as its cause. That is, "the chief function of third parties has been to bring new issues before the people: they force new policies upon the older parties, and after accomplishing their work they pass away." In this sense, as historian Richard Hofstadter stated, third parties "are like bees: once they have stung they must die." In fact, he even goes on to say that "their function is largely that of pressure groups."⁸

⁶ For instance, see Pradeep Chhibber and Ken Kollman, "Party Aggregation and the Number of Parties in India and the United States," *American Political Science Review*, 92: 2 (June, 1998), 329-342.

⁷ Paul Kleppner, *The Third Electoral System, 1853-1892: Parties, Voters, and Political Cultures* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

⁸ Fred E. Haynes, *Third Party Movements since the Civil War, with Special Reference to Iowa* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1916), p. 3; Richard Hofstadter, "Political Parties," in C. Vann Woodward, ed., *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, [1968] 1997), pp. 210-211. This, it should be noted, is not to deny that the third parties actually function that way. Also, third-party leaders themselves were aware of their impact on political discourse. John Russell, one of the chief promoters of party formation in the prohibition movement,

But it is hard to believe that somebody would go all the way to organize a political party just to pressure the major parties to adopt a certain political stance. This is particularly true for those who already have alternative ways to influence major party politicians. And the two social movements that are taken up in this paper, the prohibitionists and the labor reformers, as will be discussed shortly, not only had plenty of ways to do so but also had already achieved some policy changes to their liking. If we are not going to accept this functional explanation at face value, we must take these social movements themselves seriously, understanding that they were trying to achieve their goal not indirectly through pressuring major parties, but by capturing the government themselves.

What I am proposing here may be called a “supply-side” view of third parties, as opposed to the prevailing demand-side view that concentrates on the constituency and its behavior. And taking such a view on the two minor parties immediately gives rise to two subproblems, which are to be tackled in the following sections. First, in order to counter the fatalistic view that tacitly supposes that the third-party leaders never envisaged their electoral victory, the reason why the movement leaders thought that they had the realistic chance of winning the election has to be identified. But before doing so, another challenge has to be met, that is, figuring out why they thought creating their own political party was better suited to reach their goals than the methods they had so far been using. It should be noted here that these methods cover both political and non-political modes of action, since a social movement does not always have to use public policy as a means to attain its ends.

Having said all this, how should the post-Civil War emergence of the two parties be

argued that by organizing the National Prohibition Party, “the whole question [of liquor traffic] will be brought more prominently before the public, and thoroughly discussed through the secular press of the country; thus securing the most effective agency for educating the masses on the vital issues of the reform.” “A Plea for a National Temperance Party,” reproduced in *The Proceedings of the National Temperance Society*, 1868, p. 118.

examined? What is clear from the above discussion is that an analytical framework that only covers the political parties does not meet the analytical demands here. In *Why Parties?* John Aldrich explains in a persuasive manner how (major) political parties developed and then evolved in the U.S., using rational choice theory. His research demonstrates why a political party was useful to politicians, both within the government and in mobilizing the constituency for election. For this kind of analysis to work, however, it must be presupposed that the political actors in question already aspire to political office, making the approach incompatible with the present research concerns.⁹

What is at stake here, instead, is the choice made by movement leaders between two forms of activity, embodied by social movement organization and by political party. This means that the analytical framework for the present research must be capable of covering more than one form of organization and explaining the institutional change from one form to another. This is why I will make use of the notions of *organizational repertoire* and *organizational form*, which have largely been employed by sociologists to examine the different forms social movements take and the shift from one form to another.¹⁰

Of the existing research that utilizes this set of analytical terms, particularly important to the present research is Elisabeth Clemens's *The People's Lobby*. In it, Clemens explains how and why various social movements began adopting interest-group politics at the turn of the twentieth century. She treats the movement leaders as rational, utility-maximizing actors who try to select the organizational form that would best help the movement achieve its goal. Their selection, she argues, is affected primarily by two variables. First, the new organizational form would be, and could only be, selected from available organizational

⁹ John H. Aldrich, *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, second ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), esp. Ch. 6.

repertoires, which would be the stock of organizational forms known to the key actors. Also, the leaders take into account the political opportunity structure, or the surrounding institutional settings that influence the movement's effectiveness, when making the choice.¹¹

The relevance of Clemens's work to this research is twofold. When we understand political party as part of the organizational repertoire of a social movement, it should be obvious that Clemens's work and this paper have very similar research interests. To use her terminology, this paper seeks to demonstrate why the two social movements decided to adopt political party as their organizational form after the Civil War. Even though the need to study political party as a possible organizational form of a social movement has been suggested, the works that actually apply the framework to political parties are still rare.¹² In this sense, I hope that the present research serves both as an example and catalyst for future research in this direction. Secondly, the two studies, Clemens's and mine, partly share the same subject, as she deals with the social movements' abandonment of political party as organizational form, which they had adopted immediately after the Civil War. In a way, therefore, this paper serves as a prequel to the story told in her work.

In the following two sections, I will investigate the cause of the emergence of third parties after the Civil War by dealing with the two subproblems stated above. During the course of discussion, the movement leaders will be treated as goal-seeking actors who were willing to switch between organizational forms when it seemed expedient, and both primary and secondary materials will be consulted to show their perceptions and actions.

¹¹ Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

¹² Paul Burstein, "Interest Organizations, Political Parties, and the Study of Democratic Politics," in Anne N. Costain and Andrew S. McFarland, *Social Movements and American Political Institutions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), 39-56.

2. Why Parties?

The two social movements to be analyzed in this paper may seem to have little in common if we only look at their objectives and political fates. On the one hand, the temperance movement, of which prohibitionists were part, was devoted to teetotalism, the total abstention from alcoholic drinks, and was aimed at countering the “liquor interests” and stopping the “liquor traffic.” Since the late 1860s, the movement had regularly participated in elections for major political offices, including the presidency, through its own political parties, both state-level ones and the National Prohibition Party, which was founded in 1869. In fact, the national party still exists today and claims itself to be the “oldest third party in the United States.”¹³

On the other hand, the labor reformers were aspiring to improve labor conditions and were particularly interested in realizing the eight-hour day. The movement also began forming political parties at the state level in the late 1860s, but when it finally went on to form the National Labor Reform Party in 1872, something unexpected happened. Their presidential nominee, U.S. Supreme Court Justice David Davis, declined the candidacy after failing to win the Democratic nomination, feeling he no longer had a chance. Being unable to provide a substitute, the party collapsed, and the task of fighting elections under the banner of labor was left to several state-level parties, mostly in the Northeast. The labor reformers would reappear on the front stage of politics only after aligning with the Greenback Party later in the decade, although by that time the Knights of Labor was also gearing up for

¹³ <http://www.prohibition.org/>, accessed Aug. 7, 2003; Ann-Marie Elaine Szymanski, “‘Think Locally, Act Gradually’: Political Strategy and the American Prohibition Movement during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” (Ph. D. diss., Cornell University, 1998); James Ross Turner, “The American Prohibition Movement, 1865-1897.” (Ph. D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1972); Roger C. Storms, *Partisan Prophets: A History of the Prohibition Party, 1854-1972* (Denver: National Prohibition Foundation, 1972).

political organization.¹⁴

The differences between the two cases outlined above may give the impression that it makes no sense to discuss the two movements in the same context. When we turn our eyes to the development in their organizational form, however, it becomes immediately clear that they are strikingly similar, almost identical. We shall hereafter be focusing on such similarities and explore, step by step, why they emerged despite the difference in the ultimate goals in the two cases.

One of the similarities occurred within a couple of years of the end of the war. The two movements both established a national-level summit organization which would serve as the institutional hub or tie to existing organizations. Only four months after the termination of the armed conflict, the temperance reformers founded the National Temperance Society and Publishing House (hereafter NTS), which was followed by the labor reformers with the organization of the National Labor Union (hereafter NLU) in 1867. As has been pointed out by Theda Skocpol, voluntary associations in the U.S. have tended to use the federal structure of the government as their model, and this was precisely what happened in these two cases.¹⁵ It was the first time for the labor reformers to have a blanket organization that reached across different regions and trades, whereas the temperance reformers had maintained a national body since the 1830s.

Why, then, did the leaders of both movements felt the need to create another national-level organization, this time a political party, within five years of setting up the first? The answer to this question has to cover three awkward points, which is why these

¹⁴ David Montgomery, *Beyond Equality: Labor and the Radical Republicans, 1862-1872* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, [1967] 1981); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

¹⁵ Theda Skocpol, "How Americans Became Civic," in Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement in American Democracy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999), p. 47.

movements are perfect “hard cases” for our investigation. Firstly, there is no reason to believe that the movement leaders were dissatisfied with their existing organizational forms, at least insofar as the achievement of political goals was concerned. This is because the two movements had already been successful to a certain degree in the antebellum period in securing legislation that helped advance their causes. The labor movement had won the ten-hour day in several states while they only relied on nonpartisan political activities such as petitioning. The significance of the prohibitionists’ accomplishment hardly requires explanation. Since the enactment of the Maine law in 1851 that prohibited the sale, and the manufacturing for that purpose, of “intoxicating liquors,” twelve states and territories had followed suit within the next four years.¹⁶

If the creation of the political party in each case itself seems puzzling, the particular form the parties took is even harder to explain. The issues the two movements raised upon party formation, prohibition and labor conditions, were generally considered problems that should be taken care of by state and local governments, and as we have just seen, they were actually treated as such. Aside from advancing the state-by-state building of party organizations, however, both movements went on to form a national-level political party with the intention of capturing the federal government. But why did they feel the need to engage in a fight for federal-level electoral offices, a fight which would undoubtedly be more costly and would also seemingly bring about little practical gain, that is, even if the challenge turned out to be successful? As the primary interest of this research is in organizational forms, any satisfactory explanation for the movements’ institutional change should answer the question

¹⁶ Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860: The Reaction of American Industrial Society to the Advance of the Industrial Revolution* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, [1924] 1990), Chs. 8-10; Teresa Anne Murphy, *Ten Hours’ Labor: Religion, Reform, and Gender in Early New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), Ch. 6; Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979), Ch. 10; Margaret Susan Thompson, *The Spider Web: Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 47.

of why it involved the creation of a national-level party.¹⁷

In addition to these two problematic questions, there is another—probably the most confusing—fact about the post-Civil War organizational innovation which needs to be considered. That is, most, if not all, antebellum social movement leaders were squarely *opposed* to political parties, not only in practice but even in principle. This hostility derived from their self-identification as social reformers. Through their endeavors in advancing their causes, movement leaders of the day were not simply trying to promote their own interests. Instead, they believed that their activities would benefit the whole of society. This was true for the two movements under discussion, too. Temperance reformers thought that alcoholic drink was harming society as a whole by making people idle and depriving families of husbands and fathers. According to the labor reformers, making work hours shorter would help improve the general state of the American republic, as laborers would then be able to use their increased leisure time for study, and become more informed citizens.¹⁸

The self-appointed reformers viewed political party, in stark contrast, as a tool politicians used to further their narrow self-interest efficiently. They thought that the nature of political parties was clearly evident in the spoils system, which in their eyes was nothing more than the organized exploitation of governmental resources by party chieftains. In this sense, the movement leaders retained the republicanism of the early republic, in which political parties were considered factions of unscrupulous men that would prevent the public from seeing what was good for the whole polity. It was this kind of conviction that kept the abolitionists, who were representative antebellum reformers, away from political parties. The Liberty Party,

¹⁷ D. Leigh Colvin, *Prohibition in the United States: A History of the Prohibition Party and of the Prohibition Movement* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1926), p. 38.

¹⁸ According to historian Ian Tyrrell, the prohibitionists in the 1850s “deliberately refused to form separate Maine Law parties but sought instead to persuade candidates of the existing political parties to pledge themselves in favor of the Maine Law.” Tyrrell, *op. cit.*, p. 280; Montgomery, *op. cit.*, pp. 236-239. Also see John R. Commons et al., *History of Labour in the United States* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1918), II, pp. 87-91.

founded in 1840 by the members of the American Anti-Slavery Society who were against the leadership of William Lloyd Garrison, received little support both from within and without the movement. According to Wendell Phillips, who still acted together with Garrison at that time, the true abolitionists had to rid themselves “not merely of *old* parties, but parties themselves, reaching beyond the ballot box.” Although these two abolitionists later found themselves congenial to the aims of the Republican Party, especially after the outbreak of the Civil War, they nevertheless maintained lukewarm attitudes towards the party throughout the rest of their careers.¹⁹

It must be clear from the above that in the antebellum political context, there were more factors apparently working against the social movements’ formation of political parties than those that would encourage it. If this is the case, why did so many reformers suddenly turn to political parties to carry their cause forward after Appomattox? By 1870, for example, Wendell Phillips was accepting the gubernatorial nominations from the Prohibitionist and Labor Reform parties in Massachusetts.²⁰

If the roots of the postwar institutional change cannot be found in the antebellum period, it seems only natural to assume that they lie in the period more immediately preceding the shift in organizational form, in the Civil War era. Something had taken place during the war period that had so much impact on the reformers that it not only reversed their negative view of political parties but also led them to organize their own parties. The most important political event concerning party politics and reform in this period is no doubt the Republicans’ rise to power and their conduct of war, including the abolition of slavery. And careful

¹⁹ Vernon L. Volpe, *Forlorn Hope of Freedom: The Liberty Party in the Old Northwest, 1838-1848* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990), Ch. 3; Henry Mayer, *All on Fire: William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1998), pp. 274-277; Wendell Phillips quoted in James Brewer Stewart, *Wendell Phillips: Liberty’s Hero* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 194.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Ch. 13; Dale Baum, *The Civil War Party System: The Case of Massachusetts, 1848-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), Ch. 7.

analysis reveals that it was indeed this wartime experience which made the reformers undergo a political conversion.

Simply put, the Republican Party provided the reformers with an organizational model as they were renewing their efforts to reform American society after the Civil War. The key point here is that during this period, the Republicans achieved an important social reform, the abolition of slavery, within ten years of the party's establishment, while abolitionists' fervent efforts through various associations, including the American Anti-Slavery Society, had not even come close to reaching the same result after several decades. In the course of events, the reformers began to perceive that a political party could be reformist, and this helped the political party as organizational form gain legitimacy among them. In another words, the political party joined the reformers' organizational repertoires in the Civil War era.²¹

In fact, it is hard not to notice the connection between the prohibitionists, abolition, and the Republican Party during this period. Many of the prohibitionists were also staunch abolitionists. They even considered prohibition as an "antislavery parallel," a reform that should go hand in hand with the abolition of slavery. It was imperative for the anti-Democratic forces in the early 1850s to win their support in order to create a new major party that could beat the Democrats. In the end, the prohibitionists joined the Republican ranks, persuading themselves that abolition was the more pressing and serious issue of the day. But it should be kept in mind that they did so only after they reached an agreement, albeit a tacit one, with their fellow Republicans that the party would turn to the liquor issue once the slavery issue was resolved. This is why prominent prohibitionists who would later lead the

²¹ Historian Ronald Walters's argument in his classic work on antebellum reformers resonates with my observation when he says that the Civil War was a turning point in the history of reform, since by then the reformers realized how little they had accomplished in the preceding years and that they "had been far too optimistic about what propaganda and moral suasion could do." Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815-1860*, rev. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), p. 17.

formation of the prohibitionist party, such as Neal Dow, James Black, and John Russell, played an important role in organizing the Republican Party, especially in the Northeast.²²

That the postwar organizational innovation of the reformers was inspired by the success of the Republicans is also shown in the specific form of political party they chose: *national* political party. After all, the novelty of the Republican policy against slavery was that the party dealt with the issue within the federal-level political process. To be sure, the party's initial position of opposing the expansion of slavery further into the western territories was a source of frustration rather than a reason for praise for the abolitionists. But during the Civil War, the Republicans first freed the slaves in the eleven Confederate states in 1863 by Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and then finalized the abolition two years later by putting the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution into effect, which also required the approval of the Congress. When we also take into account what the party later did, or tried to do, for the freedpeople through additional federal legislation and two U.S. constitutional amendments, it should not be surprising that the postwar reformers, especially former abolitionists, felt that the federal government was now the friend and promoter of reform.

It should also be kept in mind that the expansion of authority and resources of the federal government over the four years of armed conflict began to affect the causes of the two movements under discussion in many ways. By the end of the war, the government was the largest single employer in the nation, and this fact made the labor reformers increasingly aware of the labor conditions of federal employees, urging them to request the eight-hour rule for government employees and also the creation of a federal bureau of labor statistics. The

²² *The Cyclopaedia of Temperance and Prohibition* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891), pp. 30-33; Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us from Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 39; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Chs. 4 and 5; Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), p. 155.

licensing of liquor manufacturers and dealers under the federal Internal Revenue Act of 1862 seriously annoyed the temperance reformers, as it seemed to them as if the government was giving the liquor traffic its official approval, although the states were still free to regulate it. The development of the central state in this era was thus casting its shadow on the activities of social reformers, too.²³

By carrying out a major reform through shaping a series of federal-level public policies, the Republicans made such a strong impression on the reformers that they began imitating not only the party's organizational form but also the manner in which the party brought the abolition reform forth. Both labor reformers and prohibitionists announced at the foundation of their parties that they would pursue federal legislation. Later, in 1876, the National Prohibition Party resolved in their platform that "an Amendment of the National Constitution" to render the prohibitory measures "universal and permanent" was necessary, now trying to abolish liquor traffic exactly as the Republicans had slavery.²⁴

Based on their observation of the Republican Party's successful reforms during the Civil War, reformers embraced political party and the federal government as the ideal organizational form and the tool through which their social reforms can be advanced. But as has been discussed earlier in this paper, that alone would not be a sufficient reason for the reformers to start their own parties. We will now turn to another subproblem which must be solved before the original question of this research can be answered, that of the third party's electoral strength.

²³ Gerald N. Grob, *Workers and Utopia: A Study of Ideological Conflict in the American Labor Movement, 1865-1900* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1961), pp. 18-19; Thompson, *op. cit.*, p. 46; Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), p. 45; Earl Clifford Kaylor, "The Prohibition Movement in Pennsylvania, 1865-1920." (Ph. D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1963), pp. 52-53, Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 52-55.

²⁴ Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, comp., *National Party Platforms, 1840-1964*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1966), pp. 43 and 52; Szymanski, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

3. Why Organize?

“After reconstruction the next great question will be the overthrow and suppression of the legalized liquor traffic.”²⁵ It was widely held by the prohibitionists that this was something Abraham Lincoln had said on the day he was assassinated. Although it is an unconfirmed statement, the very fact that the reformers believed the story serves as an indication of their new positive view towards political parties. But the same fact raises more questions than it answers. If the Republicans would eventually handle the prohibition issue, why did the reformers have to create a political party of their own? Even if they did, was there any realistic chance of their beating the major parties?

These questions suggest that the sheer effectiveness of a certain organizational form in itself is not a good enough reason for a social movement to adopt it. Indeed, the two movements did not start organizing parties right after the war. Having just seen a political party accomplish an important reform, the reformers were counting on the major parties to further their causes after the war. Even after the formation of the National Prohibition Party, there were state temperance societies whose attitude towards politics was to secure prohibition “inside the [major] political parties if we can, outside we must.” As discussed above, prohibitionists had good reason to believe that the Republicans would become the party of prohibition, now that the slavery was gone. In fact, William Dodge, the first president of the NTS, had already been elected to the federal House of Representatives when he assumed the office.²⁶ The NLU declared, also in its founding convention in 1867, that “the time has come for the laborers of the United States to separate themselves from the ties

²⁵ Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

²⁶ *Fifth Annual Report of the National Temperance Society and Publication House* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1870), p. 10; Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-16; *Proceedings of the National Temperance Convention* (New York: J. N. Stearns, 1865), pp. 29-36.

with their old parties and form the National Labor Party,” but it was as late as 1871 that the organization finally decided to call a national party convention.²⁷

The reformers felt that they should allow some time for the major parties to turn to their reforms, as the parties would first have to deal with southern reconstruction. And it was only after a few years when they began to think that they had been betrayed by the existing parties and that they could no longer expect anything from them. In the reformers’ view, the parties did not just fail to advance their cause; it even seemed as if some of the fruits of their past labor were lost within those few years. During and after the Civil War, many of the state-level Maine Laws enacted in the 1850s were either repealed or modified to allow the commercial circulation of liquor. By the end of the war, there were only five states, all in New England, in which Maine Law was still in effect. But the biggest problem was that even the existing laws were not enforced properly. Most state governments of the day lacked the resources for an effective enforcement of the law, and there were also those which did not take the law seriously to begin with. In the meantime, the number of saloons and liquor shops steadily increased.²⁸

The situation was not much different with the labor reformers. The two major parties, competing with each other for the workers’ support, never forgot to pay lip service to them in their platforms. According to the *Nation*, the labor problem was “already an essential part of party platforms” by the time the National Labor Reform Party was formed. Some state legislatures in the North even passed eight-hour laws, and the federal government also set an eight-hour rule for its blue-collar workers in 1868, but as was the case with the Maine Law, their execution was far from satisfactory.²⁹

²⁷ John R. Commons et al., eds., *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1958), p. 135.

²⁸ Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-48; Clark, *op. cit.*, pp. 47-49; Pegram, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁹ *Nation*, Sept. 5, 1872. Also see Montgomery, *op. cit.*, Ch. 8; *New York World*, Feb. 8, 16, June 15,

It was this sense of disillusionment that drove the reformers to organize the third parties. But the movements' rank and file members were, as most of the voting population was at the time, already strongly identified with one of the two major parties. Because of this, many of the postwar labor organizations had to forbid its members from discussing politics among themselves. That there also was a gag rule on religion indicates that the rule was a precaution against strife based on strong and diverse identities, partisan and religious, held by its members.³⁰

And this is why the reformers, upon their party formation, repeatedly argued that while they had done their best to work within the existing party system, they now had no choice but to challenge the major parties themselves because of the repeated betrayal. In their first national platform, the prohibitionists emphasized that they had not formed a party out of naked ambition. Instead, "inasmuch as the existing political parties oppose or ignore this great and paramount question, and absolutely refuse to do anything toward the suppression of the rum traffic," they were "driven by an imperative sense of duty to sever our connection with these political parties, and organize ourselves into a National Prohibition Party."³¹ A Massachusetts prohibitionist campaign pamphlet in 1870, in answer to the question, "But can we not fight the battle [against liquor traffic] inside the Republican Party?" stated that they had tried to do so but the attempt had ended in failure, because the party was divided on the

and Aug. 24, 1867.

³⁰ Montgomery, *op. cit.*, pp. 139-141. This was also the case with the Grange, one of the biggest voluntary associations of the day and de facto promoter of railroad reform. The National Grange's "Declaration of Purposes" stated that the Grange "is not a political or party organization. No Grange, if true to its obligation, can discuss partisan or sectarian questions, nor call political conventions, nor nominate candidates, nor even discuss its merits in its meetings." But the same document immediately continued that "no one, by becoming a Patron of Husbandry, gives up that inalienable right and duty which belongs to every American citizen, to take a proper interest in the politics of his country. On the contrary, it is right for every member to do all in his power legitimately to influence for good the action of any political party to which he belongs." "Declaration of Purposes," reproduced in *The American Annual Cyclopaedia and Register of Important Events of the Year 1873* (New York: Appleton and Co., 1874), p. 626.

³¹ The National Prohibition Platform of 1869, reproduced in Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

issue. And that was why their “only choice” was “between death and independent political action.”³²

According to William Sylvis, one of the chief organizers of the NLU and its president from 1868 until his death the following year, the workers of the United States must stop “the fatal blunder of selecting capitalists and their sympathizers to represent” them. And it was “the chains of party” the workers wore that kept them from doing so.³³ In order to make the eight-hour day happen, therefore, each person had to sacrifice their party support and act together. Just a few months before the first (and last) convention of the National Labor Reform Party, Horace V. Day, the first vice-president of the NLU, wrote as follows in a letter to Republican congressman George F. Hoar: “we had exhausted petition in fruitless appeal to both Political Parties.”³⁴ These statements clearly show that party formation was not the reformers’ first choice. In fact, in their view, it was not even their own choice.

Simply saying that the existing parties would not promote reform, however, would not be enough to persuade a whole movement to fight an election, and two types of opposition sprang up as the preparation for party organization was made. First, there were those who were opposed to advancing their cause through public policy in the first place. After all, not all reformers thought that it was best for them to work with the government. In the temperance movement, there were those who believed either that prohibition was totally unnecessary or that it was at best a necessary evil, thinking that temperance ultimately depended on each person’s state of mind. Those who took this view emphasized the importance of individual “moral suasion” against drunkards and saloon keepers and

³² The statement was reproduced in *ibid.*, p. 86.

³³ James C. Sylvis, ed., *The Life, Speeches, Labors and Essays of William H. Sylvis* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, [1872] 1968), pp. 179 and 182.

³⁴ Horace V. Day to George F. Hoar, Dec. 19, 1871, George F. Hoar MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

educational activities such as lyceum lectures; Protestant churches were among the strongest backers of this position in the movement. In their view, the formation of a political party would be not only a waste of time and energy; it might end up corrupting the whole movement by inviting selfish politicians into the ranks.³⁵

The opposition against creating an independent party was even stronger inside the labor movement. This was because the movement was then dividing into two wings, which were facing different directions in terms of their goals. As Victoria Hattam has pointed out, pro-party members of the movement were largely those who held the republicanist, or in this case the producerist, idea that the improvement of labor conditions would lead to the betterment of the whole society. Most of them belonged to labor unions that welcomed non-workers (with certain exceptions such as lawyers) as its members as long as they supported their cause. And with the aim of improving the general state of the republic as well as labor conditions, labor unions placed considerable weight on the education of workers and cooperation with other reform movements. As its name indicates, the NLU was organized primarily under the initiative of labor unionists.³⁶

But by this time, another trend was gaining momentum within the labor movement. In contrast to the producerist belief that there was no inherent conflict of interest between different classes, many members began to accept class division as a given fact. According to those who have adopted this view, there was no point in making the effort to achieve the eight-hour day through public policy, since the government was ruled by capitalists and would never truly act to the benefit of the workers. Instead, they suggested that they bypass the government and collectively and directly confront the employers in demanding better labor

³⁵ Turner, *op. cit.*, Ch. 2.

³⁶ Victoria Hattam, *Labor Visions and State Power: The Origins of Business Unionism in the United States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), esp. Ch. 4; Montgomery, *op. cit.*, pp. 123-124, 135-139; Commons et al., *op. cit.*, II, p. 127.

conditions. These members were not afraid of adopting the strike as part of their strategy if negotiation ended in failure, whereas labor unionists, believing that such an action would only further the split between employers and workers, were strongly against it. The trade unions, whose memberships were limited to the workers of specific trades, were thus perfectly suited to house those who were ready to abandon labor *reform*.³⁷

The second type of opposition towards party formation was voiced from the members who supported reform through public policy but nonetheless were against organizing an independent party. Already in strong support of a major party and in doubt of the new party's electoral success, they argued that pressuring major-party leaders from within the party would be more effective in securing the desired policy. As the Republican electoral strength gradually weakened towards the early 1870s, many prohibitionists began to argue that their power within the party was increasing, and that all they had to do was to hold "the balance of power" between the two major parties.³⁸

In the end, the pro-party reformers of the two movements could never really convert those who opposed the movements' entry into politics, and this undoubtedly was a part, although not the whole, of the reason why the third parties could not receive wider support. In the case of the labor movement, the ties between labor unionists and trade unionists were maintained through the late 1860s primarily because of the presence of several leaders whose view bridged those of the two groups. For instance, Sylvis, who had been the president of one of the largest trade unions of the era, the International Ironmolders' Union since 1863, believed that a "collision between capital and labor" already existed. He nevertheless remained pro-party, since "unlike our struggling brothers abroad, we have the ballot-box. We can make laws and repeal laws." And if they "would make the ballot-box a sure weapon

³⁷ Hattam, *op. cit.*, 131-139.

³⁸ *Proceedings of the National Temperance Convention*, 1865, p. 81; *Ibid.*, 1868, pp. 25-26.

of defense,” they must “appropriate it,” he said, “to our own interests, instead of to strengthen parties that make use of it to enslave us.”³⁹ His untimely death at the end of the decade quickened the pace of trade unions’ break from the NLU.

What the pro-party reformers, however, could and did do was to come up with an explanation as to why and how they could be successful if they threw their own hats in the electoral ring, an explanation which would be crucial in persuading fellow reformers who were supportive of the use of government for reform but were still dubious when it came to the new party’s prospects. In doing so, they did not simply show how they could win an election or two. They argued that their party could indeed become a major party in a new two-party system. Their conviction was based on the analysis of the political experience of the recent past, and the Republican Party served as an example which the reformers could follow, as it did for the method of securing reform.

From today’s perspective, it may seem highly unlikely that the Republicans could be the model of minor parties, as the party has now kept its majority party status for almost one and a half centuries. But in the post-Civil War years, regardless of how theoretically (in)accurate the observation is to political scientists today, the party was generally treated as a triumphant third party that had challenged and then overcome the two-party system of the Democrats and the Whigs. And this prompted the pro-party reformers to believe that they had a good chance of overthrowing the existing party system once they organized a political party dedicated to reform.⁴⁰

It should be not at all surprising that the prohibitionists adopted such a view. After all, many of the leaders played an important part in the formation of the Republican Party itself. In their mind, the organization of the prohibition party was not even their first time

³⁹ Sylvis, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 181, and 182.

⁴⁰ For instance, see *Nation*, May 1, 1866.

challenging a two-party system. In this sense, too, prohibition was a reform “parallel” to abolition. The Republican electoral success also sparked the imaginations of the labor reformers. In the letter cited above, Day also wrote as follows: “We have determined upon Political Action not lightly. We have the example of the old Anti Slavery Society for a guide....” The Society itself never organized a party, of course, so it is quite apparent that he had in mind a reformist historical trajectory in the course of which the Republicans received the abolitionist banner from the Society.⁴¹

The interesting thing here is the shape of the coming party system the pro-party reformers imagined. They did not simply conceive that their party would become an addition to the existing major parties, thereby bringing about a multiparty system. Rather, the reformers thought that their party’s entrance into party politics would shatter the political coalitions already in place and give rise to an entirely new two-party system whose defining issue would be the attitude towards their cause. In other words, the model of party-system change that the reformers pictured was practically identical to the party realignment model which is currently under scrutiny in American political science. We can see an example of such an image in the “Address to the People of the United States” prepared by Gerrit Smith, veteran abolitionist and prohibitionist, which became the first official document of the National Prohibition Party. In explaining why he had proposed in the founding convention to name the party the “Anti-Dramshop Party,” he stated: “One argument in favor of our taking this name... is that it leaves to our opponents, and will fasten upon them, their manifestly and deeply infamous name of the ‘Dramshop’ Party.”⁴²

⁴¹ Colvin, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52, 59; Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-24; Szymanski, *op. cit.*, p. 71; Horace V. Day to George F. Hoar, Dec. 19, 1871, George F. Hoar MSS, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴² For the typical image(s) of party realignment, see James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States*, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1983), Ch. 2; Gerrit Smith, “Address to the People of the United States,” reproduced in Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

The theory of party realignment, however, teaches us that for a new issue to initiate the realignment process, the existing party system must already be in decay. Perhaps not incidentally, the post-Civil War reformers were of the same opinion and had an explanation for it, too. Behind the confidence that their own party would become one of the two new major parties, there was a firm belief that the party system was becoming increasingly unstable. This was because the Republican Party had already achieved, in fact overachieved, its original goal of stopping the expansion of slavery, by abolishing the institution itself. By the late 1860s, most of the former Confederate states were back in the Union, and the legal status of freedpeople seemed to have already improved as far as it possibly could under the current political situation.⁴³

From the reformer's perspective, there was nothing left for the party to do, and yet it refused to adopt a new reform. This implied that the major parties were about to lose distinction from each other, which meant that their historical role had reached its end. And that was precisely the moment the reformist party could step in with its own issue and realign the party system. At its organizing convention, the NLU was already addressing their "fellow-citizens" that their plain and unmistakable duty was to "discard the clap-trap issues of the past" and select their "representatives in the state and national councils from the ranks of labor." The call for the first National Prohibition convention declared that "[t]he distinctive political issues that have for years past interested the American people are now comparatively unimportant, or fully settled, and in this aspect the time is auspicious for a decided and practical effort to overcome the dread power of the liquor trade."⁴⁴

⁴³ Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p.55.

⁴⁴ Commons et al., eds., *op. cit.*, IX, p. 166; The call for the National Prohibition convention, reproduced in Colvin, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

Conclusion

This was how the two parties were formed out of the seemingly hopeless political environment of the post-Civil War era. As has been noted earlier in this paper, it has often been assumed that the formation of third parties had its roots solely in the singular commitment of leaders to their cause. But historical evidence suggests otherwise. The prohibition and labor reform movements that led this first wave of third-party challenge to the two-party system was based on the reformers' careful analysis of the Republican Party's success through the war and its expected decline in the near future. In the process, they were behaving strategically, trying to maximize their chances of furthering their cause as effectively as possible. They not only had determination to win but also thought that they had actual prospects of coming out the fight triumphantly.

Of course, the logical consistency of a political actor does not always result in the actor's victory, and all the third-party challenges ended in miserable failure, at least when measured against their goal of becoming a major party. If so, what does the result of this analysis mean outside the theoretical context explained in the first section? I will conclude my discussion by placing the experience of the third parties described above in the larger contemporary political environment, thereby suggesting the historiographical and theoretical implications that can be generated from this analysis.

Perhaps this paper's most significant departure from the standard interpretation of the early postwar politics is the emphasis on the presence of political actors, in this case the reformers, who thought that the Republican party was about to end its historical role. Although it has been repeatedly pointed out by both historians and political scientists that the two major parties came to stand on a par with each other by the mid-1870s in terms of electoral strength, few have cast doubt on the predominance of the Republicans in the latter

half of the 1860s. Was it widely acknowledged that the party actually had some vulnerability in the period or was this some kind of fantasy just for the reformers? A “reality check” on the reformers’ views suggests the need for us to rethink the solidarity of the Republicans of the time.

It is definitely true that the Republican Party, securing the presidency and the two-to-one supermajority in both chambers of Congress, had no rival political force in the nation immediately after Appomattox. But fierce strife within the party between the radical and conservative wings on reconstruction issues ensued in no time. The confrontation between Andrew Johnson and the Congressional Republicans led to the former’s alliance with the ultra-conservative block of the party and then with the Democrats in 1866. The story of this conservative attempt to form a new party, the National Union movement, and its breakdown is well known, but has received little scholarly attention.⁴⁵ The movement seems to have usually been understood as an unfortunate ripple effect of the assassination of Lincoln the year before.

In the light of this research, however, the event should be given an entirely different position in the interpretive picture. After all, those who bolted from the Republican Party in favor of the third-party movement included the President, Secretary of State Henry Seward, and prominent U.S. Senators such as James R. Doolittle of Wisconsin and Edgar Cowan of Pennsylvania, most of whom had played a crucial role in the organization of the party in the 1850s. It is hard to imagine that such shrewd party leaders acted simply out of their conservatism just as it is now hard to do so for the movement leaders analyzed in this paper. It seems to make more sense if we take their attempt more seriously, that is, as an effort to bring about a party realignment, given that the Republicans had already achieved their

⁴⁵ An important exception is Thomas Wagstaff, “Andrew Johnson and the National Union Movement, 1865-1866.” (Ph. D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1967.)”

original goal and saved the Union.⁴⁶

Defiance towards party establishment spread in the following years, especially within the Republican Party. By the late 1860s, a political attitude called “independence” was spreading among the major parties. To be “independent” was to retain a critical eye towards one’s party without losing partisanship. Leading newspapers and magazines like the *Nation*, the New York *Tribune*, and the New York *World*, adopted the political stance and gave rise to the “independent journalism.” And according to the *Nation*, “[t]he Republican party, like all other parties, is a means, not an end. To keep it up because of its past services, when its inability to meet the new requirements of the country had been demonstrated, would be not politics, but fetish-worship.”⁴⁷

It was those reform-oriented Republican leaders from the 1850s, such as Carl Schurz and Lyman Trumbull, who formed the Liberal Republicans in 1872, whose presidential nominee, Horace Greeley, and party platform would be accepted by the Democrats in the party’s national convention. Although the splinter party collapsed after the defeat that year, Schurz and other leading Liberals called themselves “Independents,” maintaining their ties to the Republican Party but always ready to criticize or even oppose it whenever it seemed necessary. Such a belief made them cross party lines in 1884 and support the Democratic presidential candidate Grover Cleveland, in the face of Republican denunciation calling them “Mugwumps.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Brooks D. Simpson, *The Reconstruction Presidents* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 86; Michael Perman, *Reunion without Compromise: The South and Reconstruction, 1865-1868* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 170.

⁴⁷ *Nation*, May 5, 1870; Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Press Gang: Newspapers and Politics, 1865-1878* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

⁴⁸ Matthew Thomas Downey, “The Rebirth of Reform: A Study of the Liberal Reform Movements, 1865-1872.” (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 1963); Jacqueline Balk Tusa, “Power, Priorities, and Political Insurgency: The Liberal Republican Movement, 1869-1872.” (Ph. D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1970); Mark Wahlgren Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The making of a President, 1884* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Historians have demonstrated that it was already widely accepted by the mid-nineteenth century that *two* parties should form the party system. But it was not at all decided that the same set of two parties would indefinitely dominate the party system. It must be kept in mind that no set of two parties had reigned for more than a single generation before the emergence of the third-party system. Most postwar Americans had witnessed the destruction of a major party and its replacement by a newly organized third party. Given that this was the case, it should not be surprising that people expected some kind of party system change to take place once the Republican Party, as *Harper's Weekly* stated just before the end of the war, "secured its great object of limiting the extension of slavery." According to the magazine, "the old party lines" did not separate the Americans any more and hence they were "at the end of parties." In this sense, the third-party leaders analyzed in this paper resonated perfectly with the general public.⁴⁹

In the unprecedented political calm which has fallen upon the country it is only natural that issues should present themselves of a different kind from those that have engaged the public mind during a generation. And it is upon this situation that the Democratic party founds its hope of returning to partial power. For the new issues arise, of course, in the Republican party, which comprises the great body of independent and progressive men, and of those who are inspired by other purposes than the possessions of the spoils merely.... The new issues, therefore, will spring from the Republican party, and the first one, apparently, is to be that of temperance.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Harper's Weekly*, Feb. 25, 1865; Silbey, *op. cit.*, p. 77; Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 268-271. Also, such a view on the Republicans and the postbellum party politics seems to be gaining support among historians and political scientists who are studying this period. Cf., Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Gretchen Ritter, *Goldbugs and Greenbacks: The Antimonopoly Tradition and the Politics of Finance in America, 1865-1896* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

⁵⁰ *Harper's Weekly*, July 17, 1869.

Four years later, the same magazine portrayed the political landscape as above in its reportage of the 1869 National Prohibition convention. It can be easily seen that the U.S. party system was constantly being challenged by new political issues and the actors who embodied them. Seen from such a perspective, a serious limitation of the party realignment theory, which is currently under criticism, can be pointed out. The theory, by taking it as a given that two neighboring realignments are separated by a few decades, tacitly ignores the possibility of efforts aimed at realignment during a period between realignments. But my analysis suggests the importance of taking the “failed” attempts of realignment more seriously, that is, if we are to understand the U.S. party-system change in a more nuanced way. And only by complicating the dichotomy between realignments and the politically stable periods between them, can we begin to comprehend the presence of third parties in U.S. politics.⁵¹

⁵¹ David R. Mayhew, *Electoral Realignments: A Critique of an American Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), esp. pp. 43-60. The following work of mine investigates why the Republicans could maintain its majority, or even major, party status throughout the late-nineteenth century by analyzing the party politics during Reconstruction. Hiroshi Okayama, “Amerika Nidaiseitosei No Kakuritsu: Saikenki Ni Okeru Sengotaisei No Keisei To Kyowa-to [The Consolidation of the American Two-Party System: The Formation of the Postwar Regime and the Republican Party],” published in five issues of *Kokka Gakkai Zasshi*, 114: 5/6 (2001), 239-298, 114: 7/8 (2001), 503-566, 115: 1/2 (2002), 57-132, 115: 7/8 (2002), 773-845, and 116: 1/2 (2003), 1-70.